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# CANON SHEEHAN

## A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS

BY

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# CONTENTS


| | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| | PREFACE ... ... ... ... ... ... | v |
| CHAPTER | | |
| I. | HIS EARLY LIFE ... ... ... ... ... | 1 |
| II. | STUDENT DAYS AT FERMOY ... ... ... | 7 |
| III. | STUDENT DAYS AT MAYNOOTH ... ... | 11 |
| IV. | EARLY MISSIONARY CAREER ... ... ... | 19 |
| V. | APPOINTED TO MALLOW ... ... ... | 25 |
| VI. | LIFE AT COBH (QUEENSTOWN) ... ... | 30 |
| VII. | PASTOR OF DONERAILE ... ... ... ... | 36 |
| VIII. | LITERARY METHODS AND HABITS ... ... | 45 |
| IX. | ILLNESS AND DEATH ... ... ... ... | 52 |
| X. | A CHAPTER OF EXTRACTS ... ... ... | 55 |
| XI. | HIS WORKS ... ... ... ... ... | 63 |
| XII. | HIS ART ... ... ... ... ... ... | 85 |
| XIII. | HIS GOSPEL ... ... ... ... ... | 89 |
| XIV. | FOUNTAINS OF INFORMATION ... ... ... | 94 |

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# CANON SHEEHAN

## Preface

THE Life of Canon Sheehan has little of the romance that frequently attends the career of the literary man. To the common observer, it was humdrum and uneventful. It was a life of seclusion, a life of unfailing fidelity to the duties of his sacred calling. There was no flourish of trumpets, no turning aside from the paths trodden by other men; there was nothing in it in the least dramatic. He modelled his career strictly on his cherished motto, " plain living and high thinking."

Wealth, fame and power might have been his, by reason of the output of his genius, but he sought none of these. He avoided them, and found his happiness amongst his favourite authors, in the society of his own lofty thoughts, and in the discharge of his duties as pastor in a secluded Irish village. His was a simple, a fruitful and a beautiful life, hence it cannot fail to interest every reader of his works.

The purpose of this book is threefold—to outline his career, to furnish some insight into his mind and character, and to review briefly his writings.

It is easy to string together the main events that make up his life-story—these vary little in the lives of Irish Secular priests; but, not so easy is the task of portraying his character so as to the give the reader a faithful representation of the Canon Sheehan of real life. Only a person who has known him intimately, who has enjoyed his society and conversation, might hope to

succeed in this undertaking. The character sketch here presented is second-hand; it is based mainly on the pen-pictures given us by Dr. Heuser, Rev. M. Phelan, S.J., and Mr. William O'Brien; on information kindly supplied by the Canon's brother, Mr. Denis B. Sheehan; by his cousin, Mother Ita O'Connell, of the Presentation Order; by Mr. Paul Mannix, Mr. John O'Connor and other parishioners of Doneraile and Mallow. All of these are most devoted to the memory of their saintly pastor, and never tire of sounding his praises. They are animated by a just pride in his greatness, and receive with a genuine Irish welcome, every interested pilgrim to the scenes of his labours.

Canon Sheehan's works have been frequently utilised, because they contain many revelations of his mind and character—they are expressions of his inmost thoughts and strongly reflect his personality. Defects may be evident in the sketch produced from this mass of information; many important tints may be wanting to the picture, but the difficulty of the task should be kept in mind by the offended critic. To outline all the manifold *traits* of even a most intimate acquaintance with whom we live and move, is beyond the skill of many of us; the task here is much more complex.

The review of Canon Sheehan's works that is added is brief and superficial. It is merely a compilation of general notes on his various books, and cannot claim to be a deep critical survey. Its chief apology is the purpose with which it is written, namely, to help to arouse our waning interest in the works of this great author, by indicating some of their many excellent literary qualities.

Though the name of Canon Sheehan is known in every Irish household, though he has been honoured in

many foreign lands, a strange apathy seems to prevail at present towards his works. They have not the popularity their merit deserves. While the shelves of book-agents in our towns and villages groan under masses of shallow, unhealthy productions, the books of Canon Sheehan are seldom seen, and in many places are now unknown. Though some of his works might stand as literary text-books for schools and colleges, they find no place, no recommendation, in our educational programmes. Even those interested in the dissemination of good literature seem forgetful of the treasures lying at their very doors.

Year after year outcries are raised against the importation of foreign evil literature into Ireland. Appeals are frequently made to native Catholic writers to supply the needs of the hour, and to stop the inroads of those modern literary harpies. Everyone realises how easily they may poison the traditional sentiments of the Irish, sap their Faith and degrade them to the level of the infidel, as did the Encyclopedists in France. Why, therefore, are not the *nova et vetera* of our treasure-houses being brought forth? Why are not the writings of our great literary men in circulation in such cheap and popular form, as will put them in reach of every household in the country? Why is the Press so silent about the merits of these works, while it finds space for pointless items of news about mankind, " from China to Peru "?

The cause of the prevailing apathy towards the works of Canon Sheehan is difficult to trace. It may be he has lived too near our day to enjoy wide popularity; often the works of men of genius remain, for long, as unwrought mines, wherein are entombed priceless gems of thought. Whatever be the cause, the discerning

reader of his books must admit their educative and inspiring influence. They appeal to the intellect and heart, and contain the essential qualities of all great literature. There is no class of reader for which he has not provided interesting and instructive books. To the priest, he is a seer, pointing out to him the dignity and grandeur of his labours amongst his flock. He reveals to him the poetry of his priestly work, and enables him to face the humdrum and routine of life with a new enthusiasm. To the pensive philosopher, he is a kindred spirit, revelling in all the mysteries that puzzle and interest the human mind. To all men he is a brilliant entertainer, a novelist of a high order, a weaver of romances that entrance the reader, enlarge his sympathies, crowd his mind with noble ideals, and fill his heart with a spiritual and chivalrous impulse. And yet, he remains

> " Like a poet hidden in the light of thought,
> Singing hymns unbidden, till the world is wrought
> To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not."

A long lapse of years may intervene before the full force of the vision and gospel of Canon Sheehan is realised. His works are not of the superficial kind that die with their generation—they are destined to live, because they are packed with great thought and a lofty idealism—they are priceless works, every one of them—even " the very sweepings of his study are gold dust."

# Chapter I.—His Early Life

THE County of Cork was the birthplace of Patrick Augustine Sheehan: he was born in Mallow, in the diocese of Cloyne, and was baptised on the 17th of March, 1852.

Mallow is a town of considerable commercial importance, situated on the banks of the southern Blackwater. It lies in the heart of a beautiful, well-wooded valley, and boasts of many historical associations. It was an ancient township, and, to this day, remain the ivied ruins of a castle of the Desmonds, which was frequently the scene of

> "Old, unhappy, far-off things
> And battles long ago."

In the vicinity of the town is a Spa, a spring highly charged with nitrogen. Over a hundred years ago, this spring was the favourite resort of invalids from every part of Ireland, but it now remains derelict and unknown. To students of more recent history, Mallow is sacred as the birthplace of Thomas Davis. Here, the youthful mind of the patriot gathered and assimilated the traditions of the locality; here, it received its bent towards the study of our National history—a study that stirred his soul to its depths and kindled a patriotic fire which burst forth in inspiring prose and immortal ballads.

We know not what part the beauties of nature, and the historical associations of his native town, may have played in the development of the artistic temperament

of Patrick Augustine Sheehan—they were not without their influence—but, it is to his parents, and to the quiet charm of a bright and happy home-circle, we must attribute the splendour of his mind and personality. The Sheehan family lived in comfortable circumstances in the street now known as O'Brien Street. The father, Patrick Sheehan, and the mother, Joanna Regan, were held in high esteem for their probity of character, intelligence and piety. They had the Irish traditional love for learning, and were prepared for any sacrifice in order to educate their children. Their home was an Academy of religion and peace. The mental and moral training of the young family was a primary concern, and every influence conducive to that noble end was enlisted.

There were four children, Hanna, Margaret, Patrick, and Denis Bernard. The two girls entered the Order of Mercy, and died young; and Denis secured an important position in the Civil Service.

Patrick Sheehan's childhood was one of great happiness. In after life he loved to recall those joyful days, with all their sunshine and freedom from care. His works are interspersed with many beautiful and touching passages, recounting the incidents, the pranks, the thoughts, the hopes, the fears, the dreams of that blissful period.

"Ah, days of childhood," he wrote, "so long and sweet and sunny and unclouded; save for the dappling of a moment's shower, or the tiny shadow of some cloudlet of sorrow, ye shall not return; no; ye shall not return any more for ever. *Vale, vale longum vale!*"

His early education was received at the National School in Mallow, where he had as class-mate a youth destined to high distinction as an author and politician

—his bosom-friend in after years—Mr. William O'Brien. Some glimpses of their school-days are given in " A Spoiled Priest "—a beautiful and pathetic story.

The teacher, Michael Francis O'Connor, was one of a by-gone type, a man with a high idea of the sacredness of his profession, and from whom the moral qualities that make for success in life received no less attention than intellectual development. " His range of attainments was limited, but what he knew, he knew well, and could impart to his pupils. He did his duty conscientiously by constant, unremitting care, and he emphasised his teaching by frequent appeals to the ferule."

The following extract is the author's own description of himself in those happy days :

" He was a fair-haired, delicate boy, with large, mistful eyes, that looked at you as if they saw something behind and beyond you. He was a bit of a dreamer, too ; and when other lads were shouting at play, he went along to some copse or thicket, and with a book, or more often without one, would sit and think, and look dreamily at fleeting clouds or running streams and then, with a sigh, go back to the weary desk again."

Though shy and reserved and much disposed to reading and dreaming, we know that Patrick Sheehan also took a deep interest in many of the sports of children. He loved cricket and hand-ball and delighted in long rambles through the fields and by the river banks, and no one hailed with greater delight than he the arrival in his native town of the travelling circus with all its fairy-land wonders.

" How we started from bed at unearthly hours, when the first rumble of the monster waggons was heard in the street, and, half-dressed, feasted our eyes on the

golden sculptures of lions and dragons that bedizened the great waggons as they thundered beneath our windows. How, despising such paltry things as mere breakfasts, we hastened to feast our eyes on the few things we were permitted to behold through the iron gates of the enclosure. . . . . With what a whoop of delight we trooped out of school, half-killing each other in our eagerness, and watched and watched until, amidst our enthusiastic cheers, the white cone of canvas shot up into the sky and the red pennant floated proudly across the azure."

The gentle influence of Patrick Sheehan's mother fostered in him a deep piety and a strong spirit of patriotism. Throughout his works we find little reference to his father, but to his mother he attributes most of his enthusiasm for Faith and Fatherland. " Her love, discriminate and wise, her deep, heartfelt, trustful religion and intense devotion to her country made a lasting impression on the boy—an impression that never entirely faded."

At school, he made no display of unusual precocity. He was a conscientious, industrious, painstaking pupil with a fondness for Mathematics. He likewise evinced a great love for his native town, its history and surrounding scenery. That love never deserted him. To those haunts of his early days, his memory returned again and again, and the district of Mallow forms the background of many of his finest pen-pictures. He ever found in those happy scenes an inexhaustible source of inspiration, a wealth of imagery that could never fail. The following extract is one of many passages that reveal his love for the scenes of his youth :

" He loved every stone, tree and bush in the neighbourhood. He lived in the past. Here was the wall

against which he had played ball—the identical smooth stone, which he had to be so careful to pick out; here was the rough crease, where they had played cricket; here the little valleys, where they had rolled their marbles; here the tiny trout-stream, where they had fished. How small it seems now: what a broad, terrible river it was to the child of thirty years ago! But he loved to linger, most of all, around the old school-house, to sit amongst the trees again, and to call up all the radiant dreams that float through the moonlight of memory."

Alas! those dream-days of childhood were early disturbed by a terrible loss and a terrible sorrow. His father died in the summer of 1863, and in the following February his widowed mother also passed to her reward.

We can easily imagine the cloud of grief that overshadowed that bereaved home. The four children were left to face the world without the help, advice and guidance that parents alone can give, and, to a youth of such a sensitive, affectionate nature as Patrick was, the blow was especially severe. No one, except one who has borne the ordeal, can ever realise the irreparable loss of a mother to a youthful family. Kind friends may render assistance and endeavour by an outpouring of sympathy to bring consolation to the bereaved ones, but never, never, can they form that close communion of mind and heart that exists between a mother and her children.

The guardianship of the young family was entrusted to Father John McCarthy, who was at that time Parish Priest of Mallow. He was a pious, conscientious Pastor and took a deep and active interest in the welfare of the unhappy orphans. After the sale of the home and business, they were placed under the care of a lady in

Mallow, who had been a trusted friend of their parents, and everything possible was done to brighten their desolate lives.

When they were ready to begin their secondary education, the girls were sent to the Loreto Convent in Fermoy, and in 1866 Patrick and Denis entered the diocesan seminary in the same town.

## Chapter II.—Student Days at Fermoy

FERMOY is a comparatively modern town, the main portion of which lies on the south side of the Blackwater, in a valley under the Nagle mountains. The Seminary occupies a commanding position overlooking the river, and boasts of a well-stocked library, in which are many valuable Irish manuscripts. It is under the patronage of St. Colman and, like other diocesan colleges of Ireland, it is intended for the secondary education of boys aspiring to the priesthood.

The programme of studies is such as will fit them for Maynooth or any theological college, and aims at providing a sound elementary knowledge of the Classics, Mathematics and Modern Languages. Much attention is also paid to the development of the character and moral qualities of the students, and, as the institution is under the supervision of the clergy, religious exercises form an important part of the daily curriculum.

The Seminary is not exclusively for those preparing for the Church. Many students seek its education, who are destined for secular pursuits, and these are always sure of a sound training that will lead to any profession. The seclusion afforded for study and the deep religious and moral tone of the school tend to develop the qualities that secure success in life.

Such was the atmosphere in which Patrick Sheehan received his secondary education. We search in vain in his works for much detailed reference to his life at Fermoy. In " Geoffrey Austin " he casually states :

" I learned to play hand-ball well, and to become an

excellent batsman, not to speak of knowing fairly 'Arnold's Latin Prose Composition,' and Henry's 'First Greek Book'; and I think I could have translated Virgil or Xenophon very well if I had a good edition with copious notes like Faussett's."

It must be noted that the Mayfield school depicted in "Geoffrey Austin" was not the Diocesan Seminary. The author makes that clear in the opening paragraph of the work. Some of the characteristics of a few of the professors pourtrayed in the novel may have been drawn from teachers under whom he studied. But, the system obtaining at Mayfield was depicted as a type of education that was very incomplete and deserving of censure.

At St. Colman's Patrick Sheehan displayed no exceptional talent. He was a deeply religious boy and a conscientious and studious worker. The knowledge of Mathematics he brought from the National School was extensive for one of his years, but, after his initiation course, he soon developed a fondness for Classical studies.

We can conclude from "Geoffrey Austin" that he had the advantage of a good professor in Classics, a man who filled his pupils with enthusiasm and with interest in the authors on whom he lectured. He set as tasks to the pupils portions of the daily paper to be translated into Latin, and after examining their efforts, he would proceed to express the ideas as the ancients would have done.

"And so," he tells us, "day by day, I began to see that my mind was growing and developing under his genial and kindly influence; and the laborious work of translating, etc., was lightened by an enthusiasm such as I had never felt before. For, like all boys, I had a most thorough dislike of the hard, dry details of study;

and, let me say, my preceptors had hitherto done all they could to make the labour doubly trying, from the dry mechanical way they pursued it. I had been working in the dark. I had been making bricks without straw. I neither knew nor cared to know the language whose beauties I could not see. I was engaged in erecting a mighty scaffold around a large building that was obscured from me; and the ropes cut me and pained me till I fled from the work in horror. But my new tutor commenced by showing me the building in all its antique and massive magnificence, and then bade me learn the passwords and go within."

Every one with experience of Irish secondary education will appreciate the passage quoted. It is easily possible for a student to complete his course in one of those institutions without ever realising that the Classics are sources of pleasing and elevating thought. More frequently they are regarded as instruments of torture in the hands of merciless lectors, who use them to break and humiliate the spirits of their unfortunate captives.

But the future author's career at St. Colman's was relatively brilliant. While not outstandingly precocious in any department of his studies, he was usually among the first in his class in all subjects. He laid a good groundwork for after life, and this is the principal aim of secondary education. It does not seek to teach all things "*in globo*," but rather to evolve habits of study, to arouse interest in self-development and to point the way to the fountains of knowledge.

The years of Patrick Sheehan's residence at Fermoy Seminary (1866-1869) were stirring times in Irish politics. The Fenian Movement had then reached its zenith, and had re-animated the country with a patriotic spirit that

seemed unconquerable. The young, especially, were caught in its fire and enthused with a sentimental idealism.

" Deep down in the hearts of the poor and the toiler and the worker; in the souls of young maidens, who love the chivalrous and the ideal, and mothers, who feel for all that suffer and are lost; and, in the hot breasts of the young, who adore bravery and worship in the track of the patriot, there was many a heart-throb of sympathy for the brave young soldier, who had thrown up all the happiness and success of life and staked all, even life, for his country."

This passage from " The Graves at Kilmorna " gives a glimpse of those anxious days. The hearts of students in the seclusion of colleges beat in unison with those without, and the perusal of Ireland's sad history helped to fan the fires of patriotism in their young breasts. Patrick Sheehan was no exception. He, too, was filled with enthusiasm, and followed with breathless interest every phase of the Fenian Drama.

It was during this period his mind amassed the material and setting of his immortal work, " The Graves at Kilmorna." The vividness of that story, its historical truth of atmosphere, which was conceived and completed forty years later, help to indicate what was taking place in the author's student mind at St. Colman's. His brain was receiving and storing up treasures for after use; his talents were not dormant, but silently active.

The three years of his residence at St. Colman's passed uneventfully. He made good use of his opportunities, and in the final *concursus* for entry to Maynooth, he was leader of his class. By this time, he had definitely decided to become a priest.

## Chapter III.—Student Days at Maynooth

TOWARDS the end of August, 1869, Patrick Sheehan entered Maynooth. The college course in those days was designed to occupy a period of seven years—one year was devoted to Humanities, one to Rhetoric, two years to Mental Philosophy, Higher Mathematics and Physics, and the last three years were given exclusively to the study of Theology.

The freshmen were set a stiff examination at their entrance, and those who secured a high percentage of marks were allowed to begin immediately the study of Mental Philosophy, thereby shortening their course. Very few, however, were successful in securing this concession. It is calculated that not more than five per cent. of the freshmen obtained the requisite marks for promotion to the Philosophy classes, and their success was always regarded as a sign of exceptional ability.

Patrick Sheehan was one of the few successful freshmen of the year of his entry to Maynooth. He scored good marks, and gave proof of having made a thorough preparation at St. Colman's, consequently he was admitted at once to the Logic class.

In that year (1869) the Irish Church Disestablishment Act was passed by the British Parliament and, in accordance with its terms, Maynooth ceased to be an endowed college. The annual grant given by the Government, which was then £26,000, was withdrawn, but a sum of about £370,000 was handed over for investment as a compensation and to enable the college to continue.

The management of the institution was taken out of the hands of lay trustees and given to a Committee selected from the Irish Bishops.

This change of status in the college, while a financial disadvantage, secured to the ecclesiastical authorities greater freedom of control. They began immediately to exercise their rights by drastic alterations in the rules and curriculum of studies. The traditional routine was broken up; shuffles were made among the teaching staff, new text-books were introduced, and an unsettled spirit resulted that was reflected in the studies and discipline of the students. The customary incentives to study were wanting, and consequently, a lack of enthusiasm for work manifested itself throughout the whole institution. This condition of affairs was natural and unavoidable. The authorities in the college were confronted with a new and difficult task, and the measure of their success has not been sufficiently appreciated by the Irish people.

Patrick Sheehan began his studies in Maynooth in those unfavourable circumstances. After his first triumph at his entrance examination, he secured no further honours, and this is a singular fact in the life of one who afterwards revealed such a versatile intellect. But, it must be remembered that he was much younger than those against whom he was competing, and most of his class had already the advantage of a couple of years' tuition in the college. Besides, Patrick was frequently upset by periods of ill-health. If we seek further explanation for his want of distinction, we are more likely to find it in his natural bent, which led him to studies outside the curriculum of the college. He was a boy of imaginative and poetic nature in whom his dry-as-dust class work aroused no enthusiasm. He

was shy, humble and unassertive, a flower that blossomed late.

It may be interesting to inquire here what were the chief characteristics of his appointed studies, how he pursued them, and what preparation he made for his career as author.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the spirit of Rationalism infected most of the great Continental seats of learning. The foundations of Christian Revelation were assaulted in every possible manner. False and novel theories of Philosophy, Theology and History were brazenly propounded, and the researches of Biblical Criticism and the findings of the physical sciences were invoked to blunt the edge of Christian teaching. It was sought to prove Christianity a worn-out system, the falsities of which were becoming apparent—to reduce it to the level of the pagan systems of the past, and to set up Reason and Experience as the only safe guides in obtaining Truth.

Scholastic Philosophy, which had been for centuries the guardian of Christian Dogma, had grown unpopular on the Continent, and in the face of the new dangers, Catholic scholars were at a loss to know how to ward off the attacks of the Rationalists, and how to explain the apparent conflict between Christian teaching and the conclusions of modern science.

In the circumstances, the Church recommended adherence to study of Scholastic principles as the safest means of defence against the spirit and errors of the age. The wisdom of the advice is proved by the success that has attended the work of Neo-Scholastic scholars. They have dispelled the clouds raised by the theorists and specialists of Philosophy and Science, and they have shown that Catholic teaching is still uncon-

tradicted and as modern and progressive as the newest of the new-born theories and discoveries of the present day.

In accordance with the spirit of a Syllabus received from Pius IX, in 1864, the Maynooth authorities attached great importance to philosophic studies. The interest in Scholasticism was revived. The text-books were in Latin, and Latin was continued as the medium of instruction in class. Theology and Philosophy were then considered as " the be-all and end-all " of mental equipment for ecclesiastical students. Hence the study of *Belles Lettres* received little encouragement.

To one of Patrick Sheehan's imaginative and poetic disposition, the dry study of philosophic theories in a language with which he was but little familiar must have proved irksome. The text-books, too, were unsatisfactory, and there was very little to interest him in the quagmire of first principles and definitions. His youthful mind did not then perceive the beauty of that study in which he became such a profound and enthusiastic scholar in later life. In an article published in the *Irish Monthly* in the February of 1902 he thus refers to this period :

" Far back in the 'sixties, literature had to be studied surreptitiously, and under the uncongenial but very effective shadow of Perrone or Receveur. It was a serious thing to be detected in such clandestine studies, and I daresay our superiors were quite right in insisting that we should rigidly adhere to the system of pure Scholasticism, which was a college tradition. But, was not our President one of the greatest of European *litterateurs?* And, what danger could deter us from the sawpits of logic, into the garden of literature—from Barbara Celarent Darii into the moonlight and melody of Tennyson?"

Patrick Sheehan, though he did not win distinction in his studies, always secured a high place in his examinations. He learned his appointed class-work in a conscientious manner and sought no academic laurels. Notwithstanding the prevailing lack of interest in literature in the college, he did not neglect his literary studies. Much of his leisure time was passed in the college libraries, where he made the acquaintance of Shakespeare, Carlyle, Shelley, Tennyson and other masters of English literature. The following quotation from " Parerga " gives some insight into his literary browsings in those student days :

" Whatever be the cause, I cannot take half the pleasure in Shakespeare that I experience in Milton or Shelley or Wordsworth. Forty years ago, as a student, I read him closely enough, and I think appreciatively; for I still retain many a folio page of blue foolscap, on which I had culled and composed for myself certain ' *Beauties of Shakespeare.*' "

Apparently, from early life he had an elevated literary taste; his favourite authors were the kings of thought; and, from his reading in the libraries of Maynooth, he amassed a wide knowledge outside the college programme.

The course of studies in Maynooth, though tending in every way to the mental development of the students, plays but a small part in their education compared with the moral influence exercised by the rules, the devotional practices and general spirit of the college. To write of Maynooth as a great seat of learning, and to omit mention of the lofty traditions of the place and its moral influence on the characters and ideals of its students, is to give but a one-sided and very imperfect picture of the Alma Mater of the Irish Priesthood.

There are assembled upwards of six hundred young men, the *crème de la crème* of every diocese in Ireland —young men whose early years were passed in the bosom of pious family circles, whose integrity of character has been vouched for by their pastors, and whose hearts and intellects have been attuned and moulded in the seclusion of Diocesan Seminaries. They begin each term with a retreat—a few days during which studies and all mundane interests are shut out, and their souls are given up to prayer, meditation and introspection. Each morning of the academic year, they assemble for prayer, meditation and Mass; every class is begun and ended with prayer, and at the close of the day all assemble again for prayer in presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Frequent religious lectures are given by spiritual Fathers, who are specially selected to look after the spiritual advancement of the students. These men keep before them the high ideals of honour and piety to be aimed at by all aspiring to the priesthood. No sham or hypocrisy is tolerated, but the principles of self-denial, self-reverence and self-control are ever kept before their minds.

The influence of this religious training is traceable in the sense of honour and *esprit de corps* that exist amongst the students. They are respectful and loyal to each other, and are animated by a deep veneration for college traditions.

The rules, though strictly enforced by the all-pervading presence of Deans, are not regarded as a serious restraint on individual liberty. Every student experiences an atmosphere of personal freedom. And, though communication with the outside world is to a large extent banned, the games and amusements, to which recreation hours may be devoted, supply the

needful change of interest and the opportunity for strenuous bodily exercise.

Life in Maynooth is by no means dull. A sense of humour is traditional amongst the students. Every foible of character, every incongruity of action is quickly detected, and no day passes without the perpetration of some humorous pranks or the occurrence of something to occasion mirth and laughter. Little wonder, therefore, that students of Maynooth look back to their college days with happy recollections. No matter where their lot may be cast, no matter what success may crown their careers, they ever regard their days at Maynooth as amongst the happiest of their earthly span.

The piety of Patrick Sheehan's early life was fostered and strengthened by the atmosphere of Maynooth. His character was developed and his mind was filled with lofty ideals of work for the elevation and sanctification of others. As he andvanced in " age and grace and wisdom " he felt animated with great zeal and a desire for self-conquest and interior self-perfection. The characters of Luke Delmege and Geoffrey Austin give some indication of his habits of self-analysis. They reveal the deep earnestness and generous nature of the young Levite, because many of their thoughts, dreams and desires are but records of the author's own mental experiences.

In 1872 his health failed, and he was obliged to remain at home for the most of the year. He was unable to devote much time to his studies, but he, none the less, kept conversant with the business of his class. He returned to the college in the following year and resumed work; and in spite of the upset occasioned by ill-health, he completed his Theological studies before he attained the Canonical age for ordination.

In due course, however, the great event of his life drew near. His guardian, Father John McCarthy, was appointed Bishop of Cloyne; his consecration took place in the October of 1874, and on the 18th of April of the following spring, Patrick Sheehan was raised to the priesthood by Dr. Delany, Bishop of Cork. The ambition of his life was now realised—he was " a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedeck."

## Chapter IV.—Early Missionary Career

THE joy of heart experienced by the young cleric can be more easily imagined than described. A priest for ever, he was raised into a new sphere and endowed with a divine power for the consolation and uplifting of his fellow-mortals. To his sensitive and devotional nature, the spiritual world was a vivid reality. He regarded with awe and reverence the manifold duties and responsibilities of his sacred office, and realised intensely the sublimity of its dignity and the virtues and perfections required in everyone who is thus chosen from amongst men to be an *alter Christus*, " the salt of the earth and the light of the world !"

It was a time of romance and lofty idealism. His mind was filled with pure and unselfish ambitions, and his heart was flooded with a wave of generous zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This is no mere presumption or generic picture. Patrick Sheehan came forth from Maynooth animated by a lofty Christian chivalry and prepared, like the knights of old, for self-sacrifice and spiritual adventure.

However we regard the life-story of Luke Delmege as that of an abnormal and hyper-sensitive soul, ever prone to analysing, many of its pictures are but portrayals of the author's own experience. We see the reflection of his soul everywhere across its pages, and nowhere more faithfully than in his record of Luke's spiritual generosity after his ordination.

Recounting Luke's reflections on his aged Canon's casual remarks about the prospects before clerics of

talent and worth, he gives a glimpse of his own unselfish nature in those first days of his ministry :

" A respectable ' career,' ' honours and emoluments,' ' a stall in the cathedral,' these words jarred across the vibrant emotions of the young priest, and made him almost sick with their dismal and hollow sounds. Good heavens ! was this the end of all—all the heaven-sent aspirations, all the noble determinations, all the consecrated ideals, that had peopled heart and mind only a week ago, when the oil was wet on his hands and he trembled as he touched for the first time the Chalice of the Blood of Christ? How paltry every human ambition seemed then, how ragged the tinsel of Kings; how cheap and worthless the pinchbeck of earthly thrones ! How his soul burned to emulate the heroism of saints—to go abroad and be forgotten by the world, and to be remembered only by Christ—to live and die amongst the lepers and the insane—to pass with one swift stroke of the dull sound of the executioner in China or Japan to his immortal crown !"

The diocese of Cloyne was sufficiently manned with priests at the time of Father Sheehan's ordination, hence it was necessary for the newly-ordained to seek temporary missions elsewhere. This circumstance was a fortunate one in the career of the future author. It was the occasion of bringing him into new and novel surroundings, where his intellect was sharpened, his outlook broadened, and his powers of observation increased. He never failed to appreciate the opportunities of mental development afforded him at this impressionable age, and it is perhaps a gain to literature that Father Sheehan's career did not begin and end in Ireland, where missionary life, as he described it, is " merely running a knife through cheese."

### HE GOES TO ENGLAND

His first appointment was in the diocese of Plymouth, in Devonshire. He repaired there after a brief holiday in Mallow, and was retained for a short time at the Diocesan Cathedral. Father Hobson, rector in Exeter, then fell ill and was ordered a rest and a holiday, and Father Sheehan was sent to take charge of the Mission in his absence. There he remained as administrator until his recall to Ireland, two years later.

The labours of the Exeter Mission were manifold and difficult. They demanded zeal, energy and alertness, and success depended on the watchfulness and activity of the priest. In the church, neatness, order and punctuality were regarded as of supreme importance, and the ceremonies were carried out with fastidious pomp. Preaching of a high order was always expected, and careful preparation was required for every discourse, as, not only Catholic, but critical unbelievers and sincere-hearted Protestants were wont to be present to gather up some crumbs of Catholic teaching. Hence exactness, simplicity and clarity of exposition were vitally essential in the pulpit. Constant domiciliary visiting, frequent duties in convents and institutions, meetings of parochial organisations and the supervision of schools formed the routine of the priest's daily life. Each day had its allotted programme, and there was little time for relaxation.

In " Luke Delmege " we have a vivid and striking picture of life in England, as it appeared to Father Sheehan. Many of the scenes painted in that work are from personal experience and enable us to form an idea of the atmosphere and surroundings in which the clergy are obliged to live and labour. Coming, as he did, from the quiet and seclusion of college life, where the super-

natural was kept in mind at every turn, he found himself a lonely unit among seething masses of material-minded humanity. He was stunned and perplexed at their cold formalism and individual aloofness, their smug self-complacency and lack of imagination, yet, their thrift, politeness, order, method and imperial pride compelled his admiration.

" It was a huge piece of perfect polished mechanism—cold, clean, shining, smooth and regular; but with no more of soul than a steam engine. Often when the dread rattle and roar of the huge mechanism tortured the overworked nerves of Luke Delmege, and he felt as if he had been condemned for life to be imprisoned in a huge infernal Tartarus of cranks and wheels, and the everlasting roar of steam and machinery, he would steal into some quiet street, where, hidden and unseen, as God in the mighty mechanism of the Universe crouched some humble church, and, sitting on the rude benches, he would watch for an hour or two the red lamp swinging before the tabernacle, and break out into a soliloquy to ease his over-burdened heart.

" Lord, Lord ! how lonely and silent, how hidden and neglected Thou art. Of all the millions who swarm in this hideous city, how many, how few, are aware of Thy awful Presence ! There they pass and repass, Thy creatures made by Thy hands, and yet to return to Thee. They are bent on business, on pleasure, on sin; but Thou art silent; and they do not know that Thou art near."

Father Sheehan was awake to all the pitfalls that lie in the pathway of priests on the English Mission. He was on his guard against the inroads of the spirit of worldliness, and the innumerable temptations to vanity and self-seeking. His criticism of the imprudences of

Luke Delmege reflects the staidness and common sense with which he was gifted. Through " Luke " he sought to point many morals, especially to his countrymen, whose lot might be cast in circumstances similar to those he himself encountered at Exeter. The wild whirl into which he was thrown did not diminish his early piety or zeal. He held fast to the principles and example he received in Maynooth and from his own priests in Mallow; he kept throughout the heart of a child.

Many were the overhaulings and readjustments he made of his prejudices and opinions. He was all the while " unlearning the world's poetry and attaining to its prose."

As a representative of the Catholic community, he was a member of several associations established for humanitarian and social objects. Hence, he came much into contact with non-Catholics. He grew to understand their outlook on life, their peculiar traits and difficulties, and, he came to regard them with sympathy and toleration. He appreciated their many natural endowments, their earnestness and good-will, and realised that, notwithstanding peculiarities of belief and prejudiced upbringing, very often " the man's the gould for a' that."

The varied experiences of the Exeter Mission exercised a sedative influence on the character of Father Sheehan. Any native impetuosity and insular peculiarities he may have had were mellowed by his novel surroundings, and he came to view the passing show of life with a broad, philosophic mind; he concentrated on his allotted duties and awaited results with greater composure and calmness—

> " He did God's will, to him all one
> If on the earth or in the sun."

In after life, he looked back on his time in England, as a harvest of rich experience. He learned and unlearned many things, and we are indebted to those days for some of his finest thoughts and most entertaining pictures. Exeter and its grinding missionary labours played a large part in the making of the novelist, thinker and teacher. Long years after, he acknowledged his indebtedness to those experiences: "During my curacy at Exeter I learned more Theology than I acquired during my whole college career, and I gained more of practical experience than I have had since then during all the long years of my ministry."

His term of exile at length drew to a close, and, with many regrets, he left the scenes of his first labours and set out for his native diocese of Cloyne.

## Chapter V.—Appointed to Mallow

ON his return to Ireland, Father Sheehan's first curacy was in his native town of Mallow. It is not customary for priests to be appointed to the parish of their birth, but this is a matter for episcopal discretion, and does not come under any positive legislation.

After his strenuous life in England, Mallow, every district of which he knew intimately, may have been considered a suitable sphere for the young priest's labours. His health was not robust, and the hardships entailed by exploring unknown territory would thus be spared him. He would be amongst the associations of his youth, and this, in itself, would be a check on anything in the nature of Quixotic zeal with which his work in England might have inspired him.

A field of labour, very different from that he had known in Exeter, now lay before the new curate. It was a field in which there was little room for originality; life moved on traditional lines; a free and easy atmosphere prevailed everywhere, the relations between priests and people were homely and cordial, there was none of the primness and officialism of English Catholic life. No excessive supervision was required to secure attendance of the faithful at religious functions. Controversy and the doubting, inquiring spirit of the British were unknown. The priest was the head and chief representative of the community, and his advice was frequently sought, not only in religious, but in secular matters also. It may not be out of place here to quote the reflections of Geoffrey Austin in "The Triumph

of Failure" on the friendship and unity existing between the priests and people of Ireland. It is an immortal passage :

" You priests of Ireland; when will your prophet arise to tell you what an ocean of faith, and love and adoration flows softly and silently, without break or murmur, around the little islets of your existence? If we except the love of a mother for her child, earth has no love so pure, so tender, so spiritual, as the love of the Irish people for their priests. Nay, it is more elevated even than maternal love. For the mother says, ' Thou art flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone,' but this people, eliminating even that sacred if human affection, flings around the priest who absolves and sacrifices, a halo of sanctity that might be given to a guardian angel, should he stand before them visible and revealed. The old regard the priest as a son; and their eyes are moist with tenderness and veneration, when they behold, standing at the altar in sacrificial robes, not an aged patriarch with the mystic words on his forehead, and all the dignity and majesty of Aaron's priesthood around him, but a youth, scarcely passed from boyhood, yet clothed with an awful dignity of which the Jewish priesthood was but a figure and a type. And the young look upon the priest with fear and affection combined, for his presence is a revelation to them of that unseen world, of which they had been taught to dream from their earliest years. And all the fascination, which a vision of the beloved disciple, or a St. Aloysius Gonzaga will exercise on religious and emotional natures, is here centred in that white figure at the altar, which prays for them, blesses them, lifts the white Host above their heads, absolves them with words of tenderness, and speaks to them in a voice of

power and pathos of the awful mysteries of their faith. And yet, what a gulf, yawning and impassable, is between them! No matter how close the ties of affection may be, the priest moves through his people, amongst them, but not of them! Consecrated by solemn oaths, dedicated to high and sacred purposes, with all his thoughts in heaven, though his interests claim him for earth, everyone recognises that whatever else may occur, he has no part in those earthly desires that subdue, govern, subjugate humanity. The living impersonation of principles and ideas that could never have dawned upon the human mind, had they not been revealed, he walks his solitary way through life, bending, like some sublime and pitying spirit, to the weakness and wants of humanity, and then soaring aloft into solitary regions of thought, or disburthening, like the angels in the Apocalypse, the crystal vase of the tears of humanity at the foot of the throne of God!"

Such was the atmosphere into which Father Sheehan was now transplanted. He moved amongst a people imbued with a deep spiritual outlook and a lofty conception of the dignity of the priesthood, and he did everything in his power to deserve their reverence and esteem.

His experience on the English Mission had developed in him habits of punctuality and exactness in the discharge of his duties. At first, he found fault with many of the customs and shortcomings of the people, but he was not an impetuous, uncompromising reformer of the Luke Delmege type. He did what he could by advice and gentle persuasion. Gentleness, humility and refinement were his outstanding characteristics, and the people soon recognised in him one who had their interests deeply at heart.

He alternated parochial work with studies, and kept in touch with the intellectual movements of his time. He loved his books, and sought in them not merely a passive intellectual pleasure, but a driving force towards more thorough and efficient work amongst his people. The duties of his office and the uplifting and betterment of his flock came before every other consideration.

Besides his ordinary spiritual responsibilities, he found a special outlet for his zeal in the education of the young. To this work he devoted a large portion of his time. He lamented bitterly the backwardness of education in Ireland, and it was his anxiety in this matter that first induced him to write. He had a keen vision of the dangers of the future and of the necessity of an enlightened faith—the necessity of the young being prepared to give a reason for the faith that is in them. Hence, he spent much of his time amongst the school children, teaching and instructing. He found great happiness in this work, because he realised its importance for the future welfare of the little ones.

He also established a literary and debating society in Mallow, and by means of lectures and the dissemination of good books, he sought to instruct and interest the young men and women of the parish in the problems of the day. His inaugural address, delivered in the November of 1880, explains in forcible language his ideals:

"Catholics should take a pleasure in studying those subjects that have had such an attraction for the greatest minds. And to take a utilitarian view of the matter, we must remember that we are by compulsion a migratory race, that it is not given to all to die in sight of the fair hills of holy Ireland; but that hundreds and thousands are compelled to go amongst the stranger,

and to be subjected to the critical glance of free-thinkers, who identify every Irishman with Rome and Catholicity. Is it not well that we should show them that our religion is not a superstition, and that our love for it is not founded on ignorance; that if we have been denied the blessings of education for seven centuries, we had amongst us the great civilising agent of the world—the Catholic Church, that she supplied what our rulers denied, and that at any moment we are prepared to enter the lists even against trained controversialists, and to take our stand on the eternal principles of truth and justice to prove the teaching of the Church to be in all things consistent with the eternal verities of God?"

We see, therefore, that one of Father Sheehan's primary aims was to prepare the young for the intellectual battles of the future, and to bring to all the benefits of a solid Catholic education.

In this undertaking he worked with great earnestness and enthusiasm, and inspired others with the same spirit. He was not the one to feel discouraged at poor results, nor did he fold his arms in *cui bono* fashion when failure threatened his efforts. He never dreaded failure, for it was one of his first principles that every failure has in it the germ of success.

Besides the special lines of activity already indicated, his life at Mallow was much the same as the lives of the priests with whom he laboured. He was genial and friendly towards his fellow-priests, and was regarded by them as a man of deep piety and worth.

His four years as Curate in his native town passed quickly, and in 1881 he received his appointment to Cobh (Queenstown), the Cathedral Parish of Cloyne.

## Chapter VI.—Life at Cobh (Queenstown)

QUEENSTOWN occupies a beautiful, commanding position, overlooking its picturesque harbour. Till 1849, it was known as Cobh, or The Cove of Cork. In that year Queen Victoria visited the place, and its name was changed in her honour; during recent years, however, its ancient title has been restored.

Exquisite scenery lies around the town on all sides, and the climate is always singularly mild. It is a favourite haunt for tourists, affording, as it does, great facilities for boating and land excursions.

The business houses of the town are on the quay; above and behind these, along the slopes, run terraces of splendid mansions, and, on a prominent brow of the hill, stands the Catholic Cathedral.

The Cathedral is a masterpiece of Gothic architecture, and is richly decorated. Its apse, west door and chime of bells make a lasting impression on every visitor.

Queenstown is a populous and busy centre. Nearby is Haulbowline, an important naval and military station. Shipping interests in the town are extensive, and the harbour is a port of call for Atlantic liners.

The clerical work on which Father Sheehan entered in Queenstown was of a more arduous and varied nature than at Mallow, but it afforded opportunities for a wider experience of life. The scenery of the district was also conducive to the development of his artistic instinct. He loved the sea in all its moods, as his works testify, and, here in Queenstown, he was enabled to enjoy it under every aspect—he revelled in the glory of the summer sunset on the harbour and in the wild

fury of the raging storm, when the wind lashed the waves into thundering confusion.

In Queenstown, Father Sheehan was thrown once more into the society of Dr. McCarthy, now Bishop of Cloyne. His affection for the guardian of his early days finds expression in many touching passages in his works, and these passages bear testimony to the unpretentious grandeur and saintly character of the Bishop. The first chapter of his first novel, " Geoffrey Austin," gives a portrait of the worthy man :

" I must here say, that if ever a man passed through life with all his instincts unimpaired, his spirits undepressed, and his heart unhardened, it was my guardian. There was a perpetual conflict going on between his head and heart. The one was exceedingly clear, the other was exceedingly soft and affectionate; and, like most soft things in the world, it generally gained the victory."

Father Sheehan worked hard in the spiritual interests of the parish. He displayed much of the zeal and energy he afterwards attributed to Father Letheby, Luke Delmege, and others of his clerical characters. The schools and the education of the young continued to engage his attention and, as at Mallow, his every available hour was spent amongst the children.

It was at this time that questions of serious moment began to present themselves for solution. Every year, he saw hosts of Irish emigrants pass out from Queenstown harbour to seek elsewhere the living denied them at home. This doleful exodus frequently touched his heart, and he interested himself much in the sad histories of the departing emigrants. He gained a true insight into the Irish character, and grew to love his countrymen more and more. He realised the

grandeur and spirituality of their outlook, how lovable were their inner souls compared with the gross, material-minded denizens of other lands. While sympathising with them in their sorrow and misery, he beheld in them " the teachers of the world, not the pupils of its vulgarity and selfishness."

But his heart was afflicted at the thought of their unpreparedness for the dangers that lay before them. They would be thrown into a whirlpool of worldliness, where life would be a ceaseless race after wealth and material happiness, and where religion and its tenets would find no place. What an atmosphere of poison for the unsuspecting and simple-souled emigrants! What temptations to regard the teaching of their youth as a baseless myth, a story told to fools, but not to be thought of in the swirl of life!

These reflections brought home to Father Sheehan the pressing necessity of better religious education for the Irish people—such education as would enable them to appreciate more deeply the grandeur of their faith and furnish them with knowledge suitable for its defence against every form of attack, so that they might stand

" Full square to all the winds that blow."

The importance of religious instruction in Irish public schools formed the subject of his first article, which appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in the September of 1881. In that essay, we have in embryo many of the ideas which he afterwards developed in " Geoffrey Austin " and " The Triumph of Failure." " If religious instruction," he declared, " be practically eliminated from our public schools, by not being raised to a level of importance with secular learning, we shall

not remain a high-principled race nor become a cultured one."

At this period, though leading an active life in the discharge of his parochial duties, Father Sheehan found time for extensive literary studies. From his college days, he entertained a fondness for the works of Carlyle. He was attracted by his sincerity, his shrewd criticism and originality of thought. His study of Carlyle led to excursions into German Literature, from which the old Sage had drawn much inspiration. The works he then studied exercised a formative influence on his mind and filled him with admiration for German University education.

He also, at this time, turned to the works of St. Augustine, and found them interesting and inspiring. Nor did he neglect the study of the best English and French authors. He read extensively the writings of many of his contemporaries, and acquired great familiarity with the trend of modern literature. He had a taste for whatever was solid and elevating, and loathed what was mawkish and sentimental. His studies induced him to give the public the results of his reflections. He contributed several articles to the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and other periodicals of the time. These, though they revealed much sound sense, attracted little attention. It was only when the author had won fame that men turned back and realised the wealth of thought they contained.

Father Sheehan wrote many short stories during his time at Queenstown, but the power of fiction as a teaching medium did not then appeal to him so forcibly as in later years.

In 1888 his health failed; his studies and duties proved too much for his physical endurance. He was obliged

to leave Queenstown, and, after a protracted holiday, in accordance with his own desire, he was sent once more as curate to Mallow.

### RETURNS TO MALLOW

It was a great pleasure to Father Sheehan to be back again among the scenes of his youth and early life. The missionary duties of the place were not exacting, hence, he found time for literary browsing and for rambles in the open country. The change was suitable not only as a physical, but also as a mental tonic, for he had leisure for arranging and assimilating the knowledge he had already acquired.

His frequent visits to the homes in the rural districts of the parish made him perfectly acquainted with the lives, thoughts, language, customs, joys and sorrows of the people. He grew to understand them more intimately and to love and revere them. His observing eye was all the while, unconsciously perhaps, receiving those pictures and impressions that give such a lifelike charm to his works. His experiences at Mallow, therefore, were useful for the development of his artistic power.

When he had completely recovered from his illness and was able to continue his literary studies, he began to realise the part being played by fiction as a medium of instruction. The influence exercised by the great essayists of the first half of the century, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Maginn, Hazlitt and Mahony had begun to wane. Those brilliant authors were being superseded by a new band of writers, and the novel was being regarded as the popular channel for conveying information, theories and opinions to the masses, on questions in every domain of human knowledge.

Father Sheehan saw with what artistic effect and ingenuity the fruits of observation and the researches of scholars were being presented to the public. In many cases it was all in furtherance of sinister material designs; in other cases, much social reform was being accomplished by means of the novel. Dickens, by his works, had wrought a world of good for the alleviation of the miseries of the poor, and many others were helping in the same noble cause.

It now dawned on him that, if he was to make a successful appeal by means of literature, he must turn to fiction. The failure of his essays to exercise a wide and permanent influence drove home this fact. They had cost him much thought and research; he had put his best into them, but they came under the notice of a mere handful of readers, and aroused only a passing interest. At this time, however, he did not publish any of his productions, but we know that the beginning of his first novel, "Geoffrey Austin," dates from this period.

The years of his second term at Mallow were uneventful. He attended to his parochial duties, continued his studies, but gave little display of the talent with which he was gifted. His zeal, prudence and administrative abilities were recognised by his superiors and brother clerics, and in 1895, when the neighbouring parish of Doneraile became vacant, Dr. Brown, who had been consecrated Bishop of Cloyne in the previous year, appointed him Pastor.

## Chapter VII.—Pastor of Doneraile

DONERAILE is a village about six miles from Mallow. It is beautifully situated in a rich, undulating country, over which are scattered many neatly-kept farmhouses. The land is fertile, and sufficiently wooded to give the district an air of comfort, seclusion and romance. Here, in this vale of peace, Father Sheehan was destined to pass the remainder of his days, attending to the spiritual interests of his little flock, dreaming his dreams and giving to the world the imperishable creations of his genius.

It would be difficult to deal, even briefly, with all his manifold activities as Pastor of Doneraile. He was everything that a true shepherd should be. He was faithful and exact in the discharge of his religious duties —in administering the Sacraments, preaching, teaching, visiting the sick and relieving the poor. He placed his priestly responsibilities before everything else; " he was a priest first and last."

He proved a gifted administrator, a man with great practical ability for attending to the varied minutiæ of his pastoral office. Nothing tending to the honour of religion and the betterment of his flock escaped him. The interests of the people, both spiritual and temporal, were ever before his mind. He loved his people—

> " To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
> But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven."

" As one might expect," writes his great personal friend,

Father Phelan, S.J., " his church is a model of neatness; the vestments are rich and beautiful, the altar requisites perfect, and his own punctuality unfailing; the striking of the hour finds him vested and moving to the altar; to his confessional he is most devoted, and the school can always count on a daily visit. No pressure of work is allowed to rob his beloved babies of their half-hour. For the tiny tots he is a divinity; to him they pour out their childish joys and sorrows, they crowd around his confessional, and their faces glow with pleasure when he enters the schoolroom."

The education of the young was a work in which he was deeply interested. He loved the simple, artless ways of children, and his happiest hours were spent in their midst. To the teachers he was friendly and helpful, and ever willing to provide school requisites. All the schools of his parish were kept in excellent repair, and everything was done to make the lives of the children happy and cheerful.

" I never go into a schoolroom," he wrote, " without half-wishing, like John Bright, to shed a tear over those young lives with all the dread problems of life before them. Hence, too, I think we should pour into these young lives all the wine and oil of gladness we may, consistently with the discipline that will fit them for the future struggle. I cannot bear to see a child weeping. I almost feel, like Cardinal Manning, that ' every tear shed by a child is a blood-stain on the earth.' Yes, give them all the enjoyment they can hold. The struggle is before them."

When Father Sheehan was appointed to Doneraile its people were making a final stand against the old iniquitous system of land tenure—the war against landlordism was raging. The new pastor flung himself heart

and soul into the struggle, and in him the tenants found a wise, firm and gifted adviser. He was present at all their meetings, and never wearied of the discussions that took place, though frequently they were rambling and tiresome. In the end his leadership proved successful, and the prosperous condition of the present-day farmers of Doneraile is largely due to the tact and ability of Father Sheehan during the first years of his pastorate.

Though his shy and retiring disposition prevented him from indulging in pointless gossip with the people, he obtained a marvellous knowledge of every one of them. A face once seen was never forgotten, and he soon noted any, who were absent for a time from their religious duties. These he would seek out and bring back by gentle persuasion. His meekness, gentleness and sincerity were irresistible to all defaulters. Like the priest described in the Canterbury Tales,

> " Though he holy were and vertuous
> He was to sinful man not despituous."

His generous, kindly nature made allowance for the weakness and shortcomings of others; he was ever prone to find explanations for their faults, his charity was wide as humanity. He was kind and merciful to outcasts and criminals, provided he found them straightforward, but he hated double-dealing and deceit. The following extract illustrates the width of his sympathies :

" Now, I like tramps, just as I like everything planetary and wandering. It is because I am such a precisionist that I could not sit down to dinner if a picture were hung awry. A piece of torn paper on my carpet will give me a fit of epilepsy; but I can tranquilly contemplate the chaos of another's study, and even

congratulate him on his splendid nerves. So tramps, comets, variable stars, wandering lights of philosophy, stars of the outer darkness, flotsam and jetsam of heaven and earth—I have a curious sympathy with them all."

Father Sheehan's charity to the poor was unfailing; the extent of his generosity will never be known in this world, for much of it was of the unostentatious kind that merits a higher reward than the praise of men.

He established a branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Doneraile, and by this means the wants of the poor in the district were attended to with system and regularity.

All the money acquired by his pen was devoted to charitable purposes. He never wrote a line for personal gain, and his works frequently testify to his contempt for " filthy lucre."

Being a lover of retirement, he seldom went beyond the boundaries of his parish, except for a few weeks in summer to Kilkee or Tramore, or to deliver lectures in Cork or Dublin. He had no anxiety for foreign travel. He spent a short holiday in France while attached to Exeter, and in 1904 he paid a brief visit to Germany. The experience gained on these tours, though of great service in his literary work, engendered in him a dislike for going abroad. He hated the noise and bustle of the world and shunned it whenever possible. He loved the quiet and seclusion of his home and garden, the peaceful stroll along the country road and the society of the good, simple people of his parish. From them and from his books he drew his inspiration.

This *trait* of his character causes one to wonder when reading his works. He displays a surprising familiarity with the scenery, manners and customs of foreign lands; he depicts German, French and American life with

the vividness and truth of a native-born, and in nothing else is his inherent genius more forcibly displayed.

Everyone experiences how elusive is the information gained from books, how quickly their interest dies, if the frequent and intelligent intercourse of our fellow-men is wanting. Literature keeps us in touch with the great minds of all time, but it does not exercise a quickening influence without travel or social commingling. Very often book-worms become unpractical wool-gatherers and lose touch with the stern realities of life. In this, Father Sheehan was an outstanding exception. His mind was a vast storehouse of varied information, a great portion of his daily life was passed amongst books, yet, he was one of the most practical of men—a far-seeing and astute administrator.

In recognition of his pastoral ability, he was appointed a Canon of Cloyne Diocesan Chapter in 1903, and as an appreciation of the service rendered to religion by his writings, he received from Pope Leo XIII the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

The distinction of Canon is more honorary than onerous in Ireland; it imposes no additional duties beyond assisting the Bishop in council on questions of diocesan policy. One of the immortal pictures in " My New Curate " is the reception of the title of Canon by the simple old priest, " Daddy Dan." He felt confused with the honour, and spirited away his robes lest they should undermine his humility. But Father Sheehan was in no way affected by the new dignity, it made no alteration in his life save to create the title by which he has grown familiar to readers of his works.

In the summer of 1909, Canon Sheehan received an unexpected message from the diocese of Lismore in New South Wales. A cable informed him that he had

been chosen as "dignior" candidate for the vacant bishopric of Lismore. He acknowledged the honour with gratitude, but refused to allow his name to go forward to the Holy See. In language of deep humility and politeness, he wrote:

"I am now an infirm and feeble man, just able to guide the destinies of a humble Irish parish, but quite unfitted to preside over a diocese in a new and ever-advancing country."

No question of passing interest escaped the Canon's notice and consideration. Though he led a most secluded life, he kept himself in touch with all the problems agitating the minds of his contemporaries. His conversation was versatile, and his opinions were sage and practical. He was interested, in the first place, in every scheme that tended to promote the welfare of the people of Doneraile, and, secondly, he took a deep interest in politics and all national problems. His works everywhere reveal the intensity of his patriotism.

Mr. William O'Brien, who from his earliest years figured prominently in politics, was his lifelong friend. The Canon admired his candour and sincerity, his enthusiasm and ability, and did everything in his power to further the policy espoused by Mr. O'Brien and his party. He regarded Conference, Conciliation and Consent as the surest means for securing Ireland's National aspirations. He frequently helped by his pen to popularise the ideals of the All for Ireland League, and the leading article which he wrote for the first number of *The Cork Free Press* is regarded as a masterpiece of political and journalistic literature.

Canon Sheehan was not a mere partisan in politics; he was a patriot rather than a politician, and his patriotism was of the broad, tolerant type that breathes

through the works of Davis. He hated bitterness in political life, and frequently lamented the violent party feuds in which many of his contemporary politicians wasted much useful energy. He sighed for the unity of all sections, and he held to the principles he considered best towards that end.

No man bore enmity to the Canon, because he was all things to all men—charitable in thought and word and act. Hence, he was beloved and trusted, not only by those of his own faith, but by every non-Catholic that made his acquaintance. All recognised his saintliness and singleness of purpose, his humility and hidden power for doing good, his wisdom and all-embracing sympathy. He was in every phase of his character " a genuine Priest; the shepherd of his flock; or as a king is styled, when most affectionately praised, the father of his people."

As a supplement to these jottings on the life of Canon Sheehan, as Pastor of Doneraile, the following extracts are of interest. They are from the pen of an anonymous contributor to the *Irish Monthly*, and furnish a vivid picture of the Canon at home amongst his people.

" He rose at seven o'clock, said Mass at eight, and read his post after breakfast and meditation; he never opened a letter before Mass. He afterwards took a walk for nearly an hour in the country, where it was his delight to chat with the old people about old times and the Ireland of long ago. It was music to his ears to listen to them telling of the Fenians, or the Doneraile Conspiracy. Returning from his walk, he wrote for half an hour; at twelve o'clock he made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and immediately afterwards went to the schools. This was the happiest part of his day; he told the grown girls interesting stories and gave them

instructions suited to their age and needs. Into the very youngest he was particularly careful to instil devotion to Our Lady, to the Church and the Motherland. He was most anxious that the older girls should be impressed frequently with the great necessity of preserving their self-respect and avoiding giddy, frivolous company, and most of all the reading of silly novels. When he got to the baby school he was in his element. One of his favourite customs was to sit for half an hour in the midst of a class of about twenty five-year-old girls, telling them a story; they would listen in dead silence, and when he was finished would assail him with a volley of questions. Some of these were so quaint and put him into such fits of laughter that he would be forced to remove his spectacles in order to wipe the tears which rolled down his cheeks from excessive mirth. . . .

" When leaving the school he often looked back at the innocent mites, after a day of great amusement, and said : 'Oh ! if I could only keep them in their innocence always; the thought of what some of them may yet come to almost sickens me.'

. . . . . .

" After his visit to the school he attended to parochial affairs. He always managed to have part of his Office said before dinner at 4.30. After this meal he walked in the garden or saw visitors up to seven o'clock, when he invariably went to the church again to spend nearly an hour praying before Our Lady's altar; in the winter time he was always to be found kneeling there in the dim radiance of two candles which he lit before the shrine. He went home for tea at eight o'clock, after which he wrote a little or read till 9.30, when he retired to bed. Of course, he visited the sick constantly, and the country schools occasionally."

In its main features, therefore, the life of Canon Sheehan at Doneraile differed little from that of any parish priest in a rural Irish parish. The same atmosphere of quiet and seclusion pervades them all—one parish is no way singular from all others : the same round of duties, the same types of character, the same tales of joy and sorrow, success and failure confront the priest at every turn. Canon Sheehan faced his monotonous routine in the spirit of a true reformer, he did more as Pastor than keep life moving in the old rut. Actuated by an idealism begotten of reading and study, he sought in many ways to brighten the lives of the people and to induce them to lead a higher mental existence. Though he won world-wide fame as a man of letters, and though the honours of the world were his for the asking, he remained a recluse to the end, an humble pastor of a peaceful rural parish.

## Chapter VIII.—Literary Methods and Habits

THE Parochial House, where Canon Sheehan resided, looks out on the main street at the west of the village of Doneraile. Nearby flows the Awbeg, " the gentle Mulla " of which the poet Spenser sang. The house is a roomy mansion of old design, with windows scarcely large enough for the apartments they are intended to light. To the rear is a small yard with an entrance leading into a long, narrow, enclosed garden. Here, in this quiet nook, he walked and read and mused, and found inspiration for his immortal works. His pen has made the world familiar with this garden; it has cast around it a halo of romance that will never fade.

" This is its great, its only merit. It is a ' *hortus conclusus et disseptus.*' Three high walls bound it, north, south and west, and on the east are lofty stables effectually shutting out all possibility of being seen by too curious eyes. It is a secluded spot, and in one particular angle, at the western end, it is walled in by high trees and shrubs, and you see only leafage and grasses and the eye of God looking through the interminable azure.

. . . . . .

" I cannot employ a professional gardener, and it is my own very limited knowledge of, but great love for, flowers—' the sweetest things God has made, and forgot to put a soul in '—and the obedient handiwork of a humble labourer, that keeps my garden always clean and bright and, some are kind enough to say, beautiful."

The Canon spent a great portion of his leisure hours each day in his garden. He loved its calm and peace, so conducive to high thinking and literary expression, and in eloquent language he tells of its influence on the course of his thoughts.

" It is to me the grove of Academe. Here, under the laburnum or the solitary line of sycamore, I walk with spirits quite as wise as those who trod the ancient groves with Plato, and questioned him sharply, and drew out his wonderful dialectical powers. But my spirits question not. They are no sophists weaving subtleties out of a web and woof of dainty words; nor do they ask me why and wherefore. They only speak by their silence and answer my interrogations. For I am an inquisitive being, and the mystery of the world weighs heavily upon me. I have the faculty of wonder strangely developed. An ephemera floating in the summer air; a worm creeping from cave to cave in the warm open earth; the pink tips of my daisy's fingers make me glad with surprise. Miracles are all around me, and I take them literally and wonder at them. *Omnino Admirari!* is my motto : I have not steeled myself into the stoicism, that can see worlds overturned with a shrug. I have a child's wonder and a child's love."

This passage is interesting not only for the picture it gives of the Canon in his literary workshop, but also for the personal revelation it contains of his habits and mental bent. He was a man much given to introspection, silent and meditative except when duty or social entertainment required him to speak. On such occasions he was a most pleasing companion, but very frequently his manner was misunderstood. His shyness and reserve were misinterpreted as a haughty gloom resulting from an inflated opinion of his own abilities.

Yet pride had no place in the composition of Canon Sheehan; his was a simple and saintly soul.

When the weather was favourable, he did much of his reading and study in the garden. Most of his writing was done in the house at a plain little school desk, which is now kept as a cherished relic by the Presentation nuns in Doneraile.

His library was not extensive, but the material it contained was the best of its kind; it included complete editions of many of the leading French, German, Italian, English and Classical authors. Neatness and order were everywhere observed; there were no jumbled heaps of books and papers, so characteristic of the dens of literary men.

His reading covered a wide range, as his works testify, and he had a wonderful instinct for discovering whatever was worth having and of service to his purpose amongst contemporary authors. He was well acquainted with every trend of modern literature, and had a critical insight that enabled him to seize on what was destined to live among the literature of his time.

He read with great rapidity, but tore the heart out of any book he came across, and seemed to take in the drift of it by whole paragraphs. His memory was very retentive—however superficial his acquaintance with a work might be, its salient features were never forgotten. Father Phelan has given the following account of the Canon's mental equipment for the task of author:

"He had a power of observing that nothing escaped. The antics of the street arab were as carefully noted as the reddening hues of sunset, the hoarse beetling of the Atlantic or the sigh of the waving pines before his own windows. The appetite of his receptive power was enormous. He had a memory that was wax to

receive and marble to retain. Nothing eluded it. A fact, a story, a droll incident, once caught was held for ever. It stretched down to his childhood, and cast forth vividly on the canvas of to-day pictures of forty years ago. His intellect was stored with knowledge drawn from a variety of sources—books, men, travel, observation. Not only did he prove himself an assiduous reader from childhood, but he must have been a keen observer, a dreamer and a muser, hence every brain-cell was packed."

Monsignor Benson, we are told in "The Memoirs of a Brother," wrote his novels with the air of a man riding through the country and shouting for joy. Canon Sheehan's literary enthusiasm was somewhat similar. He wrote with great ease and haste, and spent very little time in the correction or revision of his manuscript. His mind was so orderly, so full of well-arranged information, that his thoughts flowed swiftly and naturally. His pen rushed along without hesitation or halt, and herein was the secret of his free and dignified style.

"Glenanaar," for example, which is a lenghty and entrancing story, and one that involved much research, was begun and finished inside two months. He seldom refused copy to the editors of the periodicals for which he was accustomed to write. Their request always found him prepared to undertake the production of something to suit their requirements, and at times these demands were very pressing; one would imagine they had forgotten he was a Pastor of souls, with many cares and serious ministerial duties.

Not unfrequently he was engaged on two or three works at the same time. He found from experience that his mind ran amuck or stopped dead in the working out of a theme; to attempt to proceed would mean the

stringing together of a mass of platitudes devoid of coherence or interest—the *divinus afflatus*—the inspiration was wanting. In such circumstances he would lay aside that work and begin another, and even a third, should a similar mental debacle occur. Then, perhaps, in the evolution of a new theme, his brain-cells would unlock and his mind would be flooded with light on his former difficulties, he would take up the trail of his narrative and pursue it to the end.

He spent little time working out the intricacies of a plot. He wrote with a moral uppermost in his mind, and the embellishments of language and illustration followed naturally the course of his thoughts. He relied for effect primarily on the vivid portrayal of character or the stimulating and suggestive power of words, and this mastery of language is one of the chief features of his art.

His handwriting was perfect; every letter stood out distinctly, and his manuscript never caused delay or misunderstanding. He spoke with great deliberation and accuracy, and held that a person should also write with the same care and desire to be understood by others. In this matter, as in all the minutiæ of life, he was a precisionist to his finger-tips.

He seldom spoke of his works or the characters they contained except in the society of sympathetic and interested friends. His mind was an open book to Dr. Heuser, his biographer; to Father Phelan, Mr. and Mrs. William O'Brien, and the nuns in the Presentation Convent in Doneraile. His visits to the Convent were occasions of great happiness. He unburthened his mind to the Sisters and discussed his books, the hopes and fears to which he gave expression and the reception they had from friendly and hostile critics. Nowhere was his

character more thoroughly understood than in the Convent, and nowhere is his loss more bitterly regretted. The sorrow of the Sisters is as deep to-day as it was the evening on which he breathed his last.

Canon Sheehan was at all times patient under criticism. He made no reply to the attacks made upon his works, though his sensitive nature frequently winced and fretted at their bitterness and injustice. The source of this forbearance is to be found in the purity of intention with which he wrote. He regarded writing as part of his mission to preach the Gospel to every creature. He delivered his message, and left the world to think as it would of his success.

He never allowed his literary work to interfere with his responsibilities as Pastor. His day was so arranged as to leave him time for every call of duty. When his parochial work was finished, he did not seek repose in inactivity, but turned to his favourite authors or the composition of his books. Herein lay the secret of his great life-work as priest and writer.

What an amazing array of books came from his pen! What a monument to his genius! In a period of less than eighteen years the following volumes appeared before the public: "Geoffrey Austin, Student," "The Triumph of Failure," "My New Curate," "Luke Delmege," "The Blindness of Dr. Gray," "Glenanaar," "Lisheen," "Miriam Lucas," "Under the Cedars and the Stars," "Parerga," "The Queen's Fillet," "The Intellectuals," "Mariae Corona," "Cithera Mea" (poems), "The Lost Angel of a Ruined Paradise" (drama), "The Graves at Kilmorna," and a volume of sermons, and one of essays and lectures.

These works, many of which involved much study and research, were written in circumstances unfavourable to

their production—remoteness from sources of reference, the distractions of a busy pastoral life, ill-health and bitter criticism. Yet, they all bear the impress of genius; they mark out their author as a highly gifted thinker and teacher, a man of wide learning and culture, a noble and saintly character.

## Chapter IX.—Illness and Death

CANON SHEEHAN'S life of ceaseless activity through his parish and at his desk could not continue for many years without detriment to his health. He was not gifted by nature with a robust constitution, and the super-human labours he undertook must eventually tell on his energies. Like Cardinal Newman, he often continued to write though suffering much, so obsessed did he become of the sacredness of his calling as an author.

Occasional attacks of severe pain and prostration indicated to him that all was not well. From his personal knowledge of the human organism, and of the "ills that flesh is heir to," he realized that something serious was amiss; consequently, in the September of 1910, he consulted the late Sir Charles Ball of Dublin. The opinion of that eminent physician was that his illness was fatal, that his life could not be prolonged for any considerable time. He was advised to desist from his literary labours, to cut out strenuous duties, and to prepare for the worst.

This dread sentence did not in the least undermine his Christian stoicism. He heard it with calmness and resignation, for, had he not already sketched with his pen all the darkest circumstances of such a reality! While the fresh blood of virile youth was dashing through his veins, his all-embracing mind had visualized everything he now experienced. Hence, it did not strike him with a sense of newness or terror.

Returning home, he imposed secrecy on all who knew of the decision he had heard, and he proceeded to discharge his daily duties as usual. But he could not bear up for long. In the summer of 1912 his condition grew very serious, and a cloud of grief settled over the whole parish of Doneraile. For several weeks his life was despaired of, and many anxious enquiries were made and many a sincere prayer was offered for his recovery. The children, especially, were grief-distracted. They missed poor "Father Pat," as he was affectionately called, and often stole to the precincts of the presbytery to have a whispered conversation with some chance visitor or attendant regarding his welfare.

In a short time he recovered slightly, and was removed to the South Infirmary in Cork. Here he received very skilful attention, and was visited every day by his brother Denis. All the while he remained cheerful and resigned and unaffected by any sentiments of gloom.

He improved to such a stage as to be able to read and write letters, and his correspondence during this period is wonderfully bright, and often humorous. His only regret was his absence from his people of Doneraile. He often spoke of them, and expressed the wish to return to die amongst them. After five months his desire was granted, and he found himself once more in his own home.

Though in a very weak condition, he insisted on being allowed to resume some of his parochial duties. He said Mass in public, gave brief lectures, heard confessions, and visited the schools. But it was evident to all that the end was near. He struggled on till August, and on the Feast of the Assumption he said his last Mass. The effort was too much for him; but he rallied for

almost two months, and passed peacefully away on Rosary Sunday, the 5th of October, 1913.

His remains were laid to rest in the churchyard of Doneraile, amid expressions of deep and universal sorrow. A plain Celtic Cross marks his grave—a fitting symbol of the service to Religion and to Ireland of this gifted and immortal priest.

## Chapter X.—A Chapter of Extracts

THE news of the death of Canon Sheehan was received with expressions of genuine sorrow not only in Ireland, but in every country where his books had penetrated. Tribute after tribute to his greatness appeared in the Press, and amongst these were some valuable character sketches worthy of preservation. They are, for the most part, by writers who had known him intimately and who could give eloquent expression to their thoughts and feelings.

The following lengthy extract from the pen of a parishioner of Doneraile gives a vivid and concise review of the character and priestly labours of Canon Sheehan :

" Never, perhaps, have such widespread tokens of respect and sorrow been manifested in Doneraile parish as during the past few days, for the loss of its saintly Pastor and kind friend. For, in losing Canon Sheehan, each one feels he has lost his best friend, dearest father and wisest counsellor. The personal interest he took in everything that concerned the welfare of the parish, the ardent desire he showed for the uplifting and betterment of his people, his devoted love for his flock, particularly the poor, endeared him to all. He was most zealous and solicitous for the happiness of his people, as is strikingly seen by the beautifully decorated parish church, the introduction of electric light into the town, the water supply system, the concreting of the street

walks and the well furnished and handsome schools throughout his parish.

" His great mind was ever concentrated on the work he had in hand; he was the very embodiment of zeal and industry; his active brain was never idle, always thinking, planning something for the improvement or the enjoyment of others, with never a thought of self.

" Much has been said of the late Canon as an eminent writer, but it is principally as an ideal pastor and beloved parish priest the people of Doneraile will ever cherish his memory. All his best interests and solicitude were devoted to their welfare, nothing he could possibly do for their spiritual or temporal advantage was overlooked by him. His daily and nightly thoughts were for his beloved people, and there was no person in his extensive parish whom he did not know intimately and in whom he did not take a lively interest.

" He took care to discover all their wants and relieve their necessities. He was always accessible to his people, encouraged them in their endeavours, comforted them in their sorrows and counselled them in their doubts. No one ever approached him who did not feel comforted or benefited by his practical advice or interesting conversation. His charities were numerous and to the deserving poor his purse was ever open, but he concealed the donorship as much as possible.

" He was averse to display or prominence of his own person, and shrank from all honours and distinctions. He was of a naturally retiring disposition, but when duty or devotion called him, he was most punctual in its discharge. He was most methodical and systematic in his daily active life and even in the arrangement of his beautiful and vast collection of books, furniture

and so on. Nothing, however insignificant, was omitted or overlooked by him, and so, he exemplified in his own person what he often inculcated in others, that 'order is heaven's first law.'

"In the company of many he was considered reticent and retiring, but, amongst his intimate friends, he was the life and soul of the conversation, and he regaled and delighted his audience with the gifts and beauties of his well-stocked mind. In manner he was most affable and agreeable, very even-tempered, and notably possessing self-control.

"It was, however, in his 'little ones,' the school children, the great writer seemed to take a special interest and pleasure, and he was most solicitous for the education and training of the young, all of whom he knew personally. He frequently visited all the schools of his parish, even the most remote. His keen observance would manifest itself on such occasions by his immediately recognising any new-comer there since his last visit. Like many great minds, he showed a great love for teaching and instructing the young; and the children of the Presentation Convent, where he almost daily visited, looked forward with the keenest anticipations to his coming amongst them, and eagerly listened to his beautiful discourses, pleasant anecdotes and interesting experiences. He seemed quite happy, even to grow young again, among those tiny ones, and would patiently listen to and solve their innocent remarks and questions. He loved his children with a fervour and tenderness which could emanate only from a large heart like his; and to see them straying from the right path would grieve him as nothing else could. And how he would apply the balm of his tender words of wisdom and advice to the aching heart! These children

appeared always to realise that in him they had a true friend, a kind father and a wise teacher.

" None, perhaps, will miss him so keenly as his own beloved nuns, for each and all of whom he evinced the most lively interest and kindest regard. Their beautiful schools and highly successful teaching are to a great extent due to his kind influence and fatherly and wise directions. In him they had ever a true father and friend. Their successful examinations, both ecclesiastical and secular, at which he always attended, afforded him a real pleasure. Their joys enhanced his joys, and he shared with them all their sorrows.

" It was to the Sunday instructions, however, which he gave regularly throughout the year, that the children looked forward with the utmost pleasure. In these instructions the gifted *litterateur* could interest by his simple language even children of tender years, whilst on those of mature minds his beautiful diction and truly religious discourse, made a most beneficial and lasting impression. He was most exact and punctual in the discharge of the religious instructions to the children, beginning with a hymn and terminating with a decade of the Rosary. He possessed the remarkable gift of rendering his sublime discourses quite intelligible to the young and ignorant.

" In the Intermediate examinations of the Christian Brothers' boys he took the keenest interest, and encouraged the boys by his beautiful and instructive exhortations on the occasion of the annual distribution of prizes, at which he never failed to be present. He truly appreciated the Christian Brothers, their good work and the success attending it.

" He always preached on Sundays at his eight o'clock Mass, and these sermons were listened to with the closest

attention by his vast congregation, a large number of which came specially to that Mass to hear his practical and eloquent discourses. If he found it his duty as Pastor to admonish, it was always with reluctance and pain, which appealed more forcibly to his flock than the adoption of sterner measures. He, too, like St. Paul, became all things to all men, that he might gain all to Christ"; and of him, as of his Divine Master, it might be truly said: "The bruised reed he shall not break and smoking flax he will not consume." He was one who endeared himself to all by his gentleness, kindness and deep interest in their concerns.

"As Chairman of the Technical Committee and the general meetings for the good of the parish, he was ever ready to assist by his punctual attendance, practical and wise guidance. In the public functions and beautiful ceremonies and processions of the Catholic Church, he was the active and guiding spirit, and carried out these ceremonies in their minutest detail.

"The people of Doneraile and the whole parish mourn deeply over the great loss that has befallen them in the death of their beloved Pastor, father and guide, and they feel they shall not see his like again."

. . . . . .

"The country is beginning to realise," wrote Mr. William O'Brien, "that in the death of Canon Sheehan it has sustained a loss which it is no misuse of language to describe as a National calamity. Since the death of Archbishop Croke removed the last heroic figure from the ranks of the Irish Episcopacy, Ireland has lost no ecclesiastic whose life-work will bulk so large in her history as a Nation. And if his life-work, splendid and

enduring though it is, was not still more prolific in the highest of all fields—influence upon the National character—the country, and it must be added his brethren in the sacred ministry, who will weep bitter tears over his coffin, are not wholly exempt from blame for a slowness of appreciation, which will now come profusely enough, but will come too late.

"It can only be hoped that in the universal concourse of mourners who will now draw around the grave of one of the truest men of genius who have illustrated the Irish name, as well as one of the truest saints who have ever sanctified the Irish soil, there may be some healthy element of humiliation for the hasty judgments, both literary and political, which possibly deterred Canon Sheehan from putting forth the still more prodigious efforts of religious and public usefulness which, under more encouraging circumstances, his God-given intellectual treasures would have empowered him to contribute to the happiness of his countrymen."

. . . . . .

We pass over many other glowing appreciations of the Canon's worth and genius to dwell on the crowning tribute paid to his memory in October, 1925, when the present life-size bronze statue was unveiled in the churchyard of Doneraile.

The memorial, which was executed by Mr. F. Doyle-Jones of London, stands on a chiselled limestone pedestal facing the entrance to the church grounds, and near the last resting-place of the Canon. The statue is life-like, and in every detail of attitude and outline bears a striking resemblance to the dead Pastor. On

the tablet of the pedestal is carved the following appropriate epitaph :

Erected
by his sorrowing parishioners and his very
many friends and admirers at Home and Abroad
in affectionate remembrance of the
VERY REV. P. A. CANON SHEEHAN, P.P., D.D.,
Doneraile, 1895-1913.

A most saintly and devoted pastor who loved especially the little children and the poor.

An author of world-wide fame, the moral of whose writings was the Glory of God and the uplifting of his fellow-men.

An ardent lover of his country and one of the most gentle and amiable of men.

His memory will be ever fondly cherished.
May he rest in peace. Amen.

The unveiling ceremony was performed by Most Rev. Dr. Browne, Bishop of Cloyne, in the presence of thousands of people assembled from every part of the country. Not only Doneraile, but all Ireland, did honour to the great priest and author. The oration of the occasion was delivered by Rev. Michael Phelan, S.J., who for years was the Canon's friend and confidant. In masterly language, he epitomised his career, and recounted the many virtues that made his life so like to that of his Divine Master.

" This statue," he declared, " will recall to you the well-remembered figure quietly passing through your streets to his morning Mass—the delicate angular features, the high intellectual forehead, the penetrating

eyes that were never disfigured by the angry fires of passion, the curving lines of sweetness around the mouth that never spoke an uncharitable word to wound the humblest child of Adam's kin, a man of masterly self-possession, whose higher faculties held in complete subjection the baser impulses of our nature. Self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control spoke in every look and gesture, reminding you of Goldsmith's famous simile:

" ' Like some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.' "

# Chapter XI.—His Works

WE now come to an examination of the legacy of books that Canon Sheehan has left behind. It is not proposed to treat them in a critical manner here, but merely to indicate the drift and purpose of each, and some of their literary charms.

As we look along the shelves of our bookcase, what an array of his works confronts us!—there are the fruits of hours and hours of high thinking stolen from the cares of his pastoral office; there are the thoughts, the ambitions, the dreams of a great mind and a lofty and saintly soul. And, if we draw closer and go through volume after volume, what a revelation of genius! What a limitless store of information, what a close, familiar acquaintance with science, art and literature, what varied powers of observation, what mental concentration, depth and originality of thought, what a pure literary taste and endless industry those works reveal! And, through all, the light of the supernatural penetrates with cheerful and consoling rays.

From the days of his second curacy at Mallow, Canon Sheehan realised the fruitlessness of appealing to the public by means of essays or lectures. The scope of circulation was too limited, and, in addition, people had developed a craving for fiction.

The era that opened with Catholic Emancipation saw the rapid growth of the novel as a form of literary expression, and the essay, which was so characteristic of the previous age, then ceased to arrest much attention. Carlyle, Newman and Ruskin found favour on account

of their super-eminent genius, but the time-spirit pointed to the novel as the literary medium of the future.

Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot had done much to create the new vogue; they revealed its possibilities, and were followed by many imitators. All these had a message to convey, but their objectives were merely humanitarian and seldom rose above temporal issues; many of them, too, were drifting into mere sensationalism and, consequently, exercising a harmful influence.

The scope of the novel as a teaching medium appealed strongly to Canon Sheehan. Catholic Theology, Philosophy, History, the whole Catholic atmosphere and attitude to questions raised by inquiring minds called for expression in attractive and popular form. The story of his native land and the lives of its people also presented instructive and inspiring material. From his success with essays and some short stories, he was conscious of possessing an amount of fitness for the task. His wide reading, too, was a source of confidence, hence he ventured, but with fear and trembling, to give to the world, in the guise of a novel, his convictions on some aspects of higher education—a subject in which he was deeply interested.

### "GEOFFREY AUSTIN, STUDENT"

Canon Sheehan's first novel, "Geoffrey Austin, Student," appeared, anonymously, towards the end of 1895. Much of the material of this work had been put together during his second term at Mallow, and in it we see the practical trend of the author's thoughts. With priestly instinct, and with all the art he could command at that early period, he emphasises the im-

portance of solid religious instruction as a complement of secular studies in schools of higher education. He draws a sad picture of the void left in the lives of those whose minds are fed solely on secular subjects. Religious teaching, therefore, as a necessary educative influence is the moral of the story.

The novel deals largely with the lives of students at a lay college near Dublin. Gayfield, now the Novitiate of the Discalced Carmelites, was a secular school in the 'seventies. The Canon's brother, Denis, studied there for some time, and from him the author learned the details of the system of education in the institution. This he pillories in the story as lopsided and Godless. The lament of Charles Travers to Geoffrey in the final chapter summarises the spirit of the work throughout.

" If in these so-called high-class colleges they taught us a little more of Christianity and a little less of paganism, a little more of Christian mysteries and a little less of the worship of Isis and Osiris, a little more of God's Mother and a little less of Minerva and Aphrodite, perhaps you and I would be better equipped for the battle of life in which we have sustained our first fall."

In " Geoffrey Austin, Student," Canon Sheehan criticised severely many of the shortcomings of the whole educational system in Ireland, hence the work was coldly received, and lay neglected by the public for over two years. But the pen of the young author was not idle during that time. When he wrote " finis " to his first novel, he added the significant words " is not yet." Father M. Russell, S.J., editor of *The Irish Monthly*, acted as literary mentor, and encouraged him to continue writing, and his next publication was " The Triumph of Failure," a sequel to " Geoffrey Austin."

### "THE TRIUMPH OF FAILURE"

In his second novel, the life-history of the hero of the previous work is continued. The struggles and failures, the ambitions, humiliations and regrets of Geoffrey, when cast into the maelstrom of the busy world, are recounted with entrancing vividness. Literature, Philosophy, even the society of kind friends, can bring no solace to his restless heart. Everywhere around him, he sees the soothing and elevating power of religion, but his intellectual pride prevents him from tasting its fruits in his own life. After a dreary chase, he is run to earth, and finds the peace of mind and heart he had so long sought, beneath the habit of an humble monk.

"The Triumph of Failure" was Canon Sheehan's favourite work. It is the work that contains most of his best thoughts, hence he cherished it. It gave scope for treatment of many questions of interest, it contains many eloquent and sublime passages, and is a lasting memorial to the deep spirituality of the author.

Owing to the philosophic nature of the new novel, it was not favourably received. Great difficulty was experienced in finding a publisher prepared to take the risk of a work that was only a sequel to one already much condemned and ignored. For two years it remained unpublished, but when "My New Curate" established the author's fame, "The Triumph of Failure" was speedily acknowledged, and appeared in 1898.

### "MY NEW CURATE"

The occasion of Canon Sheehan's next work, "My New Curate," reminds one of the origin of the Waverly Novels. Sir Walter Scott, we are told, when

under the inspiration of the poetic muse, wrote a few chapters of prose fiction, as recreation. The manuscript was thrown aside and forgotten. Some years after, he was preparing for a fishing expedition and, when searching a drawer for tackle, he discovered the discarded manuscript. He returned to it, and it formed the beginning of the Waverly series. " My New Curate " has a somewhat similar history. Father Phelan, S.J., narrates the Canon's own account of the origin of the work :

" The editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review* called on him and spent a night. During the evening he asked him to write something for the *Review* with a sparkle in it, as well as a substratum of pastoral theology, saying that American priests were hard-worked, and required a flush of humour to light up the pages of a serious review. The host assured him that he had never attempted anything of a light nature. Then a thought flashed upon him. There was a small bundle of manuscript stowed away in a back drawer. He had written it partly for amusement, and cast it aside. ' The very thing I want,' said the delighted editor, when he had read it. ' Continue that.' The tied-up bundle contained the first five chapters of— ' My New Curate.' "

The work appeared first in America, in the *Ecclesiastical Review*, and was at once hailed as one of unique interest and merit. The authorship was concealed for a time, but it gradually leaked out, and the humble Pastor of Doneraile was soon raised to a pinnacle of fame.

" My New Curate " stood alone as a clerical novel. It pictured the life of the Irish priest, its labours, its joys and its sorrows, with a truth and realism unsur-

passed by any previous author that attempted that theme. The priests and peasants of Lever and Carleton are mere burlesques in comparison; they are the creations of men who saw only the outside; they suggest the reality in many ways, but we miss the note of sympathy with the characters pourtrayed. Canon Sheehan, like Charles Kickham, painted them from within; he loved the types he depicted, and brought out the deeper and finer tints of their nature with unerring deftness and truth. The quiet philosophic humour running through the work was its chief charm—the quaint old pastor, Father Dan, has become as popular a fiction figure as Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller or any of the immortal characters of Dickens.

And, besides the sparkle, there was also a solid substratum of pastoral wisdom in the work. It taught by pictures and threw light on many Catholic doctrines and customs. It mirrored the Catholic outlook on life and the intimate union of priests and people in Ireland. "'My New Curate,'" wrote Mr. William O'Brien, "is the most delicious picture that was ever painted of the mystic relations between the Irish priest and his people."

It has remained, and seems destined to remain, the most popular of all Canon Sheehan's works. In whatever society his name is mentioned, it is always as author of "My New Curate."

### "LUKE DELMEGE"

Before the chorus of praise that welcomed "My New Curate" had time to die away, the first portion of "Luke Delmege" appeared. This was in the year 1900.

The work gives the life-story of a priest who was a distinguished student at Maynooth—a "First of First"

in his class. His experiences during a temporary mission in England and afterwards at home in an Irish parish are recounted, and, incidentally, the author indulges in some wholesome criticism on the educational equipment of the Irish priesthood and the defects of old-time pastoral methods.

None of his works drew upon Canon Sheehan such a torrent of vitriolic criticism as this novel. In many clerical circles it was received with great hostility as an attempt to lampoon the Irish clergy and to set himself up as a teacher and reformer of his fellow-workers in the vineyard. No flaw or defect in the book escaped the lynx eyes of his tormentors. They quickly forgot the genius and glamour of " My New Curate " in the excitement of their wounded feelings, and in their desire to run to earth one who presumed to laugh at sanctified traditions and native customs.

So bitter, indeed, were some of these attacks that he, himself, tells us he determined not to touch on delicate questions any more, nay, even to rest altogether from literary work, and to devote all his time to his parish and his people—" Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

One of his severest critics was the late Monsignor Hogan of Maynooth, then editor of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*. He devoted an entire article to " Luke Delmege," and censured it in forcible and impressive language, passing over no blemish of matter or style and summarily dubbing it—" a book of stilted nonsense."

This onslaught, coming as it did from a man of high literary standing, and through the pages of a periodical which was the quasi-official organ of the Irish Church and of his own Alma Mater, almost snuffed him out. But Providence decreed otherwise. His friends, Father

Russell and Dr. Heuser, editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, poured oil upon his wounds by words of consolation and by reminding him of the friendly welcome accorded all his works in America, Germany and many foreign countries. Thus, they soothed his sensitive nature and encouraged him to further efforts.

What a loss to literature and to Ireland, had he then laid aside his pen! What a regretful blunder, had the abuse of his critics succeeded in hushing him to silence! What a debt of gratitude is owing the broad-minded, kindly men—the friends in need—who held out the lamp of hope and encouragement " amid the encircling gloom."

Much of the hostile criticism of Canon Sheehan's works was directed against his apparent pedantry. His frequent discussions of philosophic questions and his introduction of the opinions and theories of authors not generally known to his readers gave some grounds for the charge. For, a display of erudition is a fatal blemish in works of fiction; one turns to a novel for amusement rather than information; a novelist who leads his readers into fields strange and unknown to them, is not likely to become popular or exercise much influence.

This fault of obtruded erudition is to be found more frequently in Canon Sheehan's early novels. When he first turned to fiction, it was as a medium of instruction; he was more concerned with his gospel than his art, hence, he endeavoured to embellish his pages with the treasures of knowledge he had garnered from the authors he had read. In his later works the handicraft of the artist is more in evidence.

Too great an outcry, however, has been raised over this blemish of Canon Sheehan's art. His novels are not

rendered dull and heavy to the extent some critics maintain, and the fault of excessive erudition is more than counter-balanced by many redeeming qualities of which his critics often seem forgetful.

"Luke Delmege" survived the first storms that assailed it, and has become a very popular work. Its contrast of English and Irish life is faultlessly drawn. Two pictures are set before the reader—one of England, progressive and refined, but mechanical and soulless, the other of Ireland, backward and dreamy, but enlivened by an atmosphere of faith, idealism and humour. The adaptability of the Catholic Church to the National character in every country is cleverly insinuated, and the acknowledged influence of the Church in the world is emphasised everywhere. For the non-Catholic anxious to gain a grasp of the spirit of Catholicity, "Luke Delmege" is a most valuable work.

"UNDER THE CEDARS AND THE STARS." "PARERGA"

Canon Sheehan was regarded by many of his early critics, especially by his brethren in the ministry, as a vain pedant who affected learning he did not possess. The knowledge that he was merely a parish priest hidden away in a quiet little country parish—a man whose college record was at best mediocre and whose subsequent career gave small opportunity for development—caused highbrows to ask: Can anything good come from Doneraile? They did not realise the genius with which he was gifted, nor did they know of his habits of study, observation and introspection and his daily intercourse with the kings of thought in many languages. But revelation awaited them, when "Under the Cedars and the Stars" and its companion volume, "Parerga," appeared.

In these books we have a compilation of the author's notes on an infinite variety of subjects—religion, philosophy, science, literature, art. There is little unity of theme, but the absence of a literary plan does not detract from the merit of the works. They are masterpieces of their kind, and through them we come into close contact with the real *Ego* of the author; we have a thrilling record of his most intimate communings; we are led along the labyrinthine ways of his giant mind and the mystery of the commonplace is unfolded to us. He glances from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth, in a fine poetic frenzy, and bears us with him into the realms of the sublime

> " Like an embodied joy
> Whose race has just begun."

" Under the Cedars and the Stars " and " Parerga " reveal, more forcibly than any other of his works the depth and universality of his learning, his discursive powers of intellect and poetic nature. They afford many examples of his style at its best, strong, incisive, suggestive.

The reception given these books in literary circles was a blow to the critics from which they never recovered. They saw in them that Canon Sheehan was not a literary impostor, but a man of lofty ideals, a man of mighty intellectual endowments, a true philosopher and a scholar.

### " GLENANAAR "

In 1905, " Glenanaar " appeared. The work takes its title from a district of that name in the parish of Doneraile—a wide, heather-clad, exalted table-land lying towards the north-western boundary of Cork.

" Glenanaar " is an historical romance based on the " Doneraile Conspiracy " of 1829, for which some of the ancestors of the parishioners of that district were tried on a charge of sedition and rebellion. The novel was written in vindication of the memory of a generation of sturdy peasants whom history had much misrepresented and maligned, and it is brightened by local colour which has since made the district it describes a favourite resort of tourists.

The plot of the story is somewhat complicated, mixing, as it does, events of modern times with those of several decades ago, but many of the scenes depicted are most realistic and thrilling, such as the night ride of William Burke, brother of one of the men on trial, the dramatic appearance of O'Connell in court, the finding of the child, Nodlac, in the snow, and the death of Edmond Connors. " Glenanaar " received an enthusiastic welcome everywhere, and especially in Ireland. It was a simple story, well told, full of patriotic spirit, and free from the faults to which home critics objected in his previous works.

### " LISHEEN "

Dr. Heuser had frequently requested Canon Sheehan to produce a work dealing with modern social problems. The task was difficult for one leading a retired life like the Pastor of Doneraile; he felt out of touch with such questions, as they affected foreign countries, yet he continued putting material together till he eventually evolved " Lisheen," which appeared in 1907.

The scope of the book was ambitious. It sought to portray the evolution of the causes of backwardness and poverty in Ireland. The evil of the landlord system was emphasised in such characters as Major Outram, and

the social problem as it affects Ireland was surveyed from many angles. "Lisheen" is, briefly, the simple annals of the poor, reflecting in every page the heroic fortitude and Christian outlook of the Irish peasant, his virtues and his true nobility. In the following rhyme, the author stated the purpose of the work:

"Why did I write 'Lisheen'? To show
The claims of brotherhood and kin,
The deep broad streams of love that flow
In peers' and peasants' hearts—the sin
Of broken plighted vows—the fate
That follows over land and sea
On wheel and rudder them that flee
The boundless bounds of the estate.
Of Right and Law inviolate,
If Nemesis relentless be,
And Fate has seals of certainty,
The spirit that has borne the test
Of spirits ranks amongst the best—
The bravest who aspire to be
The Bayards of Humanity!"

### "THE BLINDNESS OF DR. GRAY"

Canon Sheehan's next work, "The Blindness of Dr. Gray," is considered by many critics as the most perfect in technique of all his novels. The plot is simply and naturally evolved, and humour and pathos are mixed with a delightful effect. The stern old Pastor of Doonvarragh is a counterpart of Father Dan in "My New Curate." He stands out rigorous, unsympathetic, gruff and aloof, the unlovable product of a college atmosphere tainted with the gloom of Jansenism. He is actuated by high ideals of moral probity, is cold towards his people and unyielding to their wishes and

desires. He makes no concessions to their weakness, and no allowance for their shortcomings and customs. He insists on the observance of the laws of God and His Church with a characteristic motto: "It is the Law!"

A cloud of mistrust, suspicion and mutual dislike arises between Dr. Gray and his flock. He plods his lonely course, stepping carefully along a path marked out by commandments, statutes, precepts and decrees. He looks neither to right nor to left. The people yield him the respect and obedience demanded by his office, but do so in a grudging, cheerless manner.

In this setting, a romance is woven of an attachment that sprang up between the Pastor's niece, an orphan who has come to reside under the guardianship of the old priest, and a consumptive boy, Jack Wycherly, son of a Protestant doctor in the district. Many beautiful scenes from Irish rural life are developed in the course of the story, until the niece, who is a nurse, volunteers to travel abroad in attendance on the invalid boy.

Dr. Gray's moral constitution is violently disturbed by this strange undertaking, his health begins to fail, he loses his eyesight, and finally resigns his parish. In his farewell sermon—the most touching scene Canon Sheehan has depicted—he makes profession of the sincerity of his love for the people, his genuine interest in their welfare, in spite of his aloofness and natural coldness of manner, and they, in turn, give expression to their loyalty and affection for their aged pastor by their sobs and lamentations.

The story of Dr. Gray is not, as some have claimed, an autobiography of the author, nor does it reflect very much the character of Canon Sheehan. He was, as he readily admits, a lover of order, neatness and correct-

ness, a conscientious pastor, full of zeal and high aims. His early training may have developed an instinct for reform, and his attempts at greater efficiency in his clerical work may have, at times, created some of the atmosphere we catch in " The Blindness of Dr. Gray." But the similitude is only a partial one. To strangers, Canon Sheehan was distant and formal on account of his natural shyness, but with the progress of acquaintance he was kindly, genial and interesting.

### " THE INTELLECTUALS "

" The Intellectuals " is a new departure in literary form. It consists of a series of reports of the proceedings, lectures and discussions of an imaginary mutual improvement club. The range of subjects is wide and varied and embraces the orthodox, heterodox and fantastical opinions of the members.

The purpose of the work was to point the possibility of forming intellectual societies in Ireland for the promotion of higher studies and the dissemination of knowledge. The author returns to the development of many of the questions touched upon in " The Triumph of Failure."

Notwithstanding the fact that " The Intellectuals " treats of many practical theories and subjects, it is not destined to become a popular work. It demands intelligent and critical reading, hence it is " caviare to the general." The clash of opinions has not the stimulating effect the author apparently intended, but the work has many interesting, instructive and humorous passages.

### " THE QUEEN'S FILLET "

The tragic events of the French Revolution have supplied the theme of many a work of fiction. The

extraordinary men born of the circumstances of that great upheaval, the newness and daring of their ambitions, the wild frenzy that seized on the whole fabric of French society, the thrill of terror that ran through every civilized nation, afforded unlimited material for a multitude of novelists. The Revolution was a drama with many aspects, and practically every one of these had had its chronicler, but few of them have given a more faithful picture of that nightmare time than the one we find in " The Queen's Fillet."

It is an historical romance of stirring incidents, the characters stand out as we know them from history, and we follow them with breathless attention through a maze of graphically described situations. The morals to be drawn from their mad career are not lost sight of.

When writing to Father Russell in reference to " The Queen's Fillet," the author stated :

" I think I have been fairly partial all round. I have not spared the Noblesse, nor the Jacobin, nor the Bourbon, in trying to exemplify my two favourite theories—

" (*a*) That injustice begets injustice;

" (*b*) That fear has been the cause of the world's greatest crimes."

The work was well received, and has maintained a high place in the estimation of the public. Father Phelan has lavished on it unstinted praise.

" With what delicate taste the characters are assorted ! The architecture of the story, how beautifully finished ! In ' The Queen's Fillet,' not a diamond of the mosaic is out of place. When the final chapter is read, you close the book with the conviction that Canon Sheehan has presented to the world the most perfect picture it possesses of that master human tragedy."

### "MIRIAM LUCAS"

"Miriam Lucas" is a novel having for its theme the vicissitudes of fortune in the life of a young Irish girl. She lives with a decrepit father in a mansion on their estate near the seaboard. Of her mother she knows nothing—her fate is hidden in mystery. The mansion is under a curse, and all its owners are doomed to violent ends till that spell is raised.

Holthsworth, a wicked Dublin magnate, manages the estate and holds all its secrets. During one of his visits to the mansion, Miriam's father, Edwin Lucas, saunters out into a raging storm and is never again heard of. Holthsworth assumes complete control, and Miriam is compelled to reside at his house in Dublin. Here she reads much, and finally writes inflammatory articles for a labour paper, and by degrees becomes mingled with a great labour dispute which ends in a strike. Miriam saves the men from a planned slaughter, but is obliged to leave Ireland in consequence.

Arrived in America, she sets out on a weary search for her mother, whom she learned was there. Finally, after many uncanny experiences, she discovers her, a worn-out, aged creature. Miriam finds her mother was a Catholic, that she had had the title deeds of the estate, and that they were already sent to Ireland. The mother dies, and Miriam returns home, to learn of Holthsworth's violent death in an endeavour to secure the deeds. Hugh Ireton, a lover of Miriam, is now a doctor in her native district, and becomes her partner for life.

In addition to supplying many pictures of the Irish countryside, the book paints vividly the horrors of strikes, and the resposibility resting on those who contribute to their origination. It shows, also, the tragedy

of unscrupulous and treacherous leaders assuming control in those major issues that affect the community.

American life is represented in dark colours, with its traps and snares to catch unwary, innocent Irish girls. The novel throughout is one of very practical import, as well as being entertaining, but, as a romance, it is much inferior to "The Queen's Fillet" and "The Blindness of Dr. Gray." It has not the natural flow of its predecessors, and some of the scenes depicted appear to be overdrawn.

### COLLECTED ESSAYS AND LECTURES

At the request of several of his readers, the Canon collected his early essays and lectures and had them published in one volume. This book is interesting as the fruits of his novitiate days. He did not alter them in any way; we have them as they originally appeared. In the Preface he tells us:

"It is quite possible, if I were to write on these subjects now, I would treat them in a different manner and perhaps in a more modified style. But they are at least a record of certain phases of thought on problems of great moment during a literary novitiate extending over many years."

The subjects of these essays are mainly educational and literary, and they help to indicate their author's trend of thought in early life. They contain in embryo much of his after-teaching, and his articles on Emerson and the Writings of St. Augustine are essays of permanent interest. The style is clear, forcible and unadorned, with frequently a strong oratorical ring. He does not make use of illustration after the manner of Newman, but he seizes on a few phases of his subject and gives his thoughts in a plain logical way. Deep

earnestness is the pervading note; there is no trace of humour; yet he is never dull.

### "MARIAE CORONA"

"Mariae Corona" is a devotional work—a volume of sermons and essays, or "Chapters on the Mother of God and her Saints." It is natural to expect a work of this kind from an author of such deep piety as Canon Sheehan. He had a tender devotion to the Mother of God, and never wearied of holding up to the young the example of her life. These chapters were written to promulgate her praises, and to lead others to seek her intercession and to practise the devotion so characteristic of his own life.

None of Canon Sheehan's books received less hostile criticism than "Mariae Corona." It was welcomed everywhere as a book of most inspiring devotional thought couched in beautiful language. Some critics regarded "Mariae Corona" as the greatest of all his works—the one destined to exercise the widest influence and to live longest.

"The work is unique in English Catholic Literature," wrote Professor Colclough, "and every page exhales the sweet odour of the Holy Spirit. It will live, as the work of a great spiritual leader deserves to live, for the enlightenment and edification of generation after generation of Catholics, when 'Lisheen' and 'Parerga' and the rest of them are forgotten."

### POETRY AND DRAMA

Canon Sheehan's attempts at poetry and drama were not attended with success. His volume of poems entitled "Cithera Mea," and his play, "The Lost Angel of a Ruined Paradise," did not strike a popular note.

His poetry is refined and elegant, but reflects too much of the philosophic mood, and thus soars above the common current of experience. Poetry, to be popular, must be an expression of the passions, feelings and ideals of the majority of mankind; it should speak to the heart rather than the intellect, and in this Canon Sheehan fails as a poet. Of his poems, "The Canticle of the Magnificat," which resembles so much Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," is his best: his "Hymn to the Sacred Heart" is also a production of great merit.

### "THE GRAVES AT KILMORNA"

Passing over his short stories, articles, reviews and memoirs (which he destroyed), we come to consider his last novel—"The Graves at Kilmorna."

One cannot dwell on this work without a feeling of deep sadness and regret. Most of it was written when illness was casting its shadow across his career. Many of the scenes depicted are records of the experiences of childhood days. Kilmorna is no other than his native town of Mallow; the characters, too, are from real life —men and women among whom he lived and moved. Through the story runs a note of sorrow, sorrow for the swamping of a lofty, unselfish idealism, sorrow for the future, in which his prophetic gaze saw no hope of triumph for what is noble and sublime. "The Graves at Kilmorna" is his swan-song, full of pathos, patriotism and prophesy.

The story centres round the Fenian Rising of 1867. James Halpin, a school teacher, and Myles Cogan, a young gentleman of means, are the leading figures. They deplore the prevailing degeneracy of the national spirit, and seek to rouse their district by the spread of a

knowledge of the glories of the Ireland of the past. Fenianism appeals to them, and they become local leaders and organisers in the movement. Their patriotism is so unselfish that they are prepared to yield up their lives in an armed struggle in order to rouse the country. "The country needs blood-letting," argues Halpin. "We may have to teach from our graves."

The plot advances; the Rising takes place; Halpin is killed in a skirmish, and Myles receives a life-sentence; and, with this first portion of the story, the dramatic interest subsides.

The last part of the work pictures Ireland after the Rising. Life becomes normal again. Politicians begin anew, and the country jolts back into the old rut. Myles Cogan is released in a general amnesty, but, out of disgust with the low ebb of patriotic spirit, he keeps aloof from politics. Finally, he is induced to speak at an election campaign, where a stone, thrown from a hostile mob, ends his life.

The novel reveals the author's grasp of the tendencies of the Ireland of modern days; it shows how materialism was penetrating Irish life, how the ideals of the past were being supplanted by contact with the outer world, how patriotism and civic virtue were being undermined by the time-spirit. This side of the picture is in sombre colours. "Facts are facts," said Myles Cogan. "I tell you, the country is turned topsy-turvy. What was right thirty years ago is wrong to-day; and public life is wholly corrupted. Then all, everyone,"—Myles flung out his arms,—"is preaching materialism. The idea of Ireland as a great missionary country is scoffed at; the idea of Ireland as a centre of learning and sanctity, our old heritage, is not even named; the whole mind

of the country is directed in one way, to be a little England or America—factories, industries, workshops; our harbours filled with ships, our rivers polluted with slime, the atmosphere reeking with soot."

But the book gives also a bright reverse of this picture. Myles finds consolation in contemplation of the deeply-rooted faith and patriotism of the masses of the peasantry, who have remained untarnished by the degrading influences of their time. He has an undying confidence in the spiritual power of the Celtic nature to rise triumphant over moral degeneracy, and his hopes are buoyed up by the prophetic words of the learned and saintly monk, Cyril:

"The nation will go on from prosperity to prosperity. Moral degeneracy must accompany material progress. The nation will grow swollen and inflated—and then, when the climax is reached, and all the dreams of its patriots are realised, it will grow disgusted with itself, for there is one idea that can never leave it. It has haunted the race from St. Patrick downward: it has gone with them in exile: it was their comfort and anchor of hope in persecution. . . . .

"That is—the monastic idea—the idea of Bruno and Bernard, and all other saints. . . . . The nation will go on, grow fat, like Jeshurum, and kick. And then, it will grow supremely disgusted with itself; it will take its wealth, and build a monastery on every hilltop in Ireland. The island will become another Thebaid—and that will be its final destiny! . . . . A thousand years are but a day in the sight of the Eternal. Be of good hope. There is an angel watching over Ireland."

"The Graves at Kilmorna" was not published till after Canon Sheehan's death, and for some time it failed to attract attention. But, when the Irish Rising of 1916

took place, the deep import of the work and the note of prophecy it struck won for it widespread popularity. No history could give a more faithful picture of the sequence of events during Ireland's latest struggle for freedom. The military terror described in the novel, the characters portrayed, their chivalry, patriotism and general outlook class " The Graves at Kilmorna " as one of the most remarkable and prophetic works in literary history. We find in it also a brief chronicle of the times in which we live : the mind of the Ireland of to-day is truly mirrored in the latter portion of the novel. It is a gloomy picture of political jugglery, self-seeking, mutual distrust and hate, amongst quondam brothers-in-arms. It is a picture of an Ireland of shattered hopes and ideals—a land that has drifted far from the principles and the spirit of the past.

Though Canon Sheehan's labours at this story were frequently interrupted by periods of ill-health, yet we cannot detect any lack of vigour or freshness; on the contrary, it shows greater power and finish than many of his earlier works. As one lays it aside, one realises what a loss Ireland has sustained by the death of its gifted author—what masterpieces might have come from his pen, what thrilling pictures of the tragedy and comedy of Irish life, had Providence spared him longer to the people he loved.

## Chapter XII.—His Art

NOTWITHSTANDING the haste with which Canon Sheehan wrote, and his apparent disregard for accuracy of form, the impress of genius is discernible in his art. The style is the man, the expression of his thoughts and moods as they pass over his mind: it cannot be distinguished from the matter, and is governed by the idea. Canon Sheehan's style strikes us as clear and gushing, for he thought clearly and swiftly. It reminds one of the "Imitation of Christ": the sentences are short and suggestive, and, where he wishes to paint a scene with animation, he produces his effect without any excessive wealth of imagery. Whether he deals with the commonplace experiences of everyday life, or the abstruse problems of Philosophy, he always speaks in a homely, entertaining manner. "Under the Cedars and the Stars" and "Parerga" prove his genius as a literary artist more forcibly, perhaps, than any other of his works.

In the domain of fiction art plays an important part. Novel-writing demands a multiplicity of gifts. "A great novelist," writes Arnold Bennet, "must have great qualities of mind. His mind must be sympathetic, quickly responsive, courageous, honest, humorous, tender, just, merciful. He must be able to conceive the ideal without losing sight of the fact that it is a human world we live in. Above all, his mind must be permeated and controlled by common sense. His mind, in a word, must have the quality of being noble."

These are the first qualifications for success, and Canon Sheehan possessed them all in a high degree. No

one can deny his broad nobility of soul. His greatness impresses us everywhere in his works; they are full of seminal thought. The construction of his stories is simple and progressive. He relies very little on intricacy of plot, and is seldom dramatic. He gives us sketches that are true to life without much loud colouring or empty ornamentation; his humour and pathos are harmoniously blended, and his use of nature as a background gives an airy freshness to all his novels. To quote again from Arnold Bennet:

" First-class fiction is, and must be, in the final resort autobiographical. . . . . An inquiry into the career of any first-class novelist invariably reveals that his novels are full of autobiography. But, as a fact, every good novel contains far more autobiography than any inquiry could reveal."

In few novelists do we find more personal experiences and observations than in the stories of Canon Sheehan. His clerical novels, especially, are full of them. Those fortified with an outline of his life and character can see him reflected in " My New Curate," " Luke Delmege " and " Dr. Gray "; hence comes the vividness of these characters; they have about them the quality of truth; they are types of a class to which the Canon himself belonged, not, of course, to the extent of having all their foibles and excellencies—some concession must be allowed for play of imagination.

His other characters from Irish life have the same reality. Their language, thoughts, customs, humour, patriotism and all the complex *traits* that distinguish them from other peoples, reveal the author's accuracy and subtlety of observation. He gives life as it is lived in the countryside, missing but few of its graces and charms; his pictures are always clean and instructive,

and his characters are skilfully grouped so as to maintain the essential quality of unity of interest in each work.

But what of the faults of his technique? As already indicated, he has been accused of introducing, even into his works of fiction, unnecessary displays of learning and dreary discussions on philosophic questions. The cry has also been raised against his method of portraying characters, whose lives and ideals end in failure. His plots were not of the conventional type, with the lived-happy-ever-after endings. The " New Curate," " Luke Delmege " and " Myles Cogan " are characters whose idols were smashed in the rough-and-tumble of life; their histories, therefore, fill the reader with regrets.

It cannot be denied that these faults are present in his works; they detract from their merit, yet they do not mar them in any material degree as instructive and entertaining books. The sum total of excellent qualities in any of his novels dazzles into insignificance those blemishes and peculiarities in his art.

It should be noted that his last books were free from this charge of pedantry. It was only in his early writings that he yielded to the temptation to display his undoubted learning. The subjects treated in " Geoffrey Austin " and " The Triumph of Failure " were mainly educational, hence, the essayist tended to prevail over the novelist. But his later works reveal the development of his artistic sense and a more skilful handling of his material.

It is difficult to find a satisfactory explanation for Canon Sheehan's tendency to dismiss his heroes in an atmosphere of gloom. The practice is not conventional, hence it is a source of disappointment to the reader. We all crave for the happy ending, and feel depressed at the failure of our idol.

Father Phelan tells us that when the Canon's attention was drawn to this peculiarity of his stories, he replied with a smile: " If you study them closely, you will find that the failure, in most cases, is only apparent, and that the real triumph lies concealed behind the failure."

When we come to examine the characters of Canon Sheehan's heroes, we observe that they belong to the stern type that is not overcome by material reverses. They are, perhaps, truer to life than the characters novelists usually make to flit across the stage. They are represented as " unlearning the world's poetry and attaining to its prose." Their failure results in the triumph of a principle or a cause or the acquisition of something necessary to their spiritual advancement, for the absence of which no material success could compensate. In this sense, " Geoffrey Austin," " Luke Delmege " and " Dr. Gray " may be regarded as having attained success. But to discover the view-point of the author requires more study than the casual reader is likely to bestow on a novel; hence, this characteristic of his works will continue to be regarded as a blemish by the majority of his readers.

In all his writings, we recognise a strong individuality of style and technique: he was not a slave to conventional forms, nor afraid to offend against established canons. He recorded his observations " on man, on nature and on human life " in a fearless and forcible manner distinctly his own. The severest criticisms his works received are but tributes to his spirit of independence as an artist. There is something suggestive of the uniqueness of Carlyle in his art. He wrote as one deeply in earnest. He did not seek merely to amuse the multitude or please the critic; he looked for success rather to the truth and force of the message he meant to convey.

## Chapter XIII.—His Gospel

A SINGULAR characteristic of Canon Sheehan's literary taste was his dislike for Shakespeare and his love for Carlyle. Even mad Shelley, "with all his imperfections on his head," claimed no small share of his admiration. "The greatest interpreter of the human," he tells us, "the poorest interpreter of the sublime, was Shakespeare,... I hardly ever like him. I sometimes loathe him." But, of Carlyle he speaks with veneration everywhere through his works, and of Shelley he has written more than one passage of unstinted praise. "The first of English lyrists," he calls him. "Nay, I cannot retract. I place him high up there on the shelf, side by side, nay, even above Shakespeare. Like his own skylark, he never leaves the skies. At least, he never sings on earth. . . . . He is the poet of high thought, the prophet of abstractions. And he fills his pages and the universe with all kinds of transcendant creations."

But why this preference? What author has written more bitter attacks on Catholicity and everything the Church holds sacred than Carlyle? His hatred of Irishmen—the Sanspotatoes, as he nicknamed them,—was diabolical. And are not his works tinged all over with the gloom of Calvinism? As for Shelley, the plea of madness alone excuses the horrors of his life and death.

The explanation is this. In Shakespeare, Canon Sheehan recognised a product of the age of Humanism, a poet who glorified the natural man with small

reference to his higher faculties and spiritual nature. His whole outlook was human and materialistic. In Carlyle and Shelley, notwithstanding their many unlovable traits, he saw a striving after the spiritual, an admiration for Idealism, and a loathing for the gross material tendencies of their age: hence his esteem for these strange figures.

The keynote of all the Canon's philosophy was the importance of spiritual progress and spiritual conquest, and the necessity of the supernatural for human happiness and the full development of man's better nature. Material advancement counts for little. "Not by bread alone doth man live," "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world?" might be set down as the texts from which all his productions are evolved. He seeks to emphasise the presence of the supernatural all around us, to point it out to us in every phase of life, as an antidote against the time-spirit of Materialism. He reveals its operations in the lives of the poor and the lowly, where it imparts a beauty and sublimity that sets them on a plane high above their more favoured brethren. This is the solution of the paradox, "The Triumph of Failure"—temporal failure, eternal triumph.

Through his works, Canon Sheehan is a forcible and eloquent exponent of Catholic teaching. He brings home the doctrines of the Church to the minds of his readers in a pleasing, simple manner. The atmosphere of his stories is always Catholic, and created with such art as not to antagonise or repel the unbeliever. He tells an interesting tale and insinuates his moral.

The glory of Ireland was also dear to his heart. All the art of his nature was lavished out in the pourtrayal of her scenery, her people, her history. If at times he

was censorious, it was because he wanted to point the way to better things. He was alive to all the underground rumblings of Irish life. His sensitive nature responded to every shock or reaction against traditional honour and sentiment, and few questions affecting the welfare and uplifting of the Irish people escaped his sage treatment. Education, politics, social reform and many of our minor needs and grievances received his consideration.

It is of the nature of goodness to diffuse itself, to impart to others its own elevating qualities and to lead them to a higher and more perfect existence. Canon Sheehan, having saturated his being with the grandeur of Christian Idealism, having realised the heights to which human nature is capable of soaring if someone only point the way, devoted the whole might of his genius to enkindle the hearts of others with his own enthusiasm for self-perfection and true nobility of soul. He pointed out with unassailable logic the hollowness of worldly ambitions and the falsity of the standards by which men measure greatness and success. He sought to spread abroad a true Christ-like spirit of humility, meekness and love for the meanest thing that lives—to raise men's minds from the jarring wrangle of life and to teach them " to face the little drama of each day with hopeful hearts, perform its duties, enjoy its pleasures, suffer its trials, and place the sum-total at the feet of Him who is dramatic Censor of all the alternate tragedy and comedy into which life is divided."

He regarded his literary work as a sacred duty, a part of his ministry, a means of appeal to the minds and hearts, not only of his own flock, but to the many others that were not of this fold.

" What our age needs most," he wrote, " is, not the

great Catholic poet (who would be certainly not only unappreciated but gravely misunderstood), but a school of writers that, commencing with Christian Idealism, will wean men's minds away from body-worship, mammon-worship, clothes-worship, pleasure-worship, and carrying the human mind once more towards chivalry in politics, aestheticism in art, idealism in literature, romanticism in fiction, dethrone the little god-Man, and enthrone him amongst God's servants."

By the quantity and quality of his works, Canon Sheehan has contributed more than any other writer of his time towards the realisation of that ideal. Opinions may vary concerning the value of his contribution to the treasury of great thoughts and ideals, but there can be no question of the loftiness of his aim throughout all his works. We require no formal biography to tell us the manner of man he was, his noble, sincere, spiritual character is written across every page. His books are human documents full of personal feeling and deep wisdom. Whether men liked it or not, he never ceased to play the rôle of teacher, because he was convinced he had a message to convey. He gave expression to many great truths and has set a high ideal of life before his readers. He did much to counteract the influence of the false ideals of our day, and though, at times, he did not think hopefully of the world, he never laid aside his pen in despair, but continued to labour for the triumph of virtue and truth. The dread of failure never daunted him, for he held fast by this oft-repeated maxim : " Every failure has in it the germ of a great success."

But Canon Sheehan has succeeded. His influence on myriads of readers in every land has been very great. A Catholic author in the widest sense of the term, he

has been a strong spiritual force even amongst many outside the pale of the Catholic Church. Lofty thoughts and lofty ideals never fail to win admirers. Canon Sheehan has given the world such thoughts and ideals. His works are not mere superficial comments on the passing show of life; they are gems of literature full of the truths that are eternal.

## Chapter XIV.—Fountains of Information

BEFORE concluding this brief review, it is opportune to add a few notes on publications that have already dealt with this subject. Many short articles dealing with various aspects of Canon Sheehan's life and works have from time to time appeared in the Press and in current periodicals. Were these collected into a single volume, they would prove of great interest; but, scattered as they are, they can do little to perpetuate the memory of the great priest-author. Such a collcetion, however, is not necessary. In Dr. Heuser's biography of Canon Sheehan (entitled "Canon Sheehan of Doneraile") and in the beautiful outline of his life and character written by Father Phelan, S.J., for the Irish Catholic Truth Society and *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, sufficient material is given for an exhaustive study of the author and his works.

Dr. Heuser had been for years editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Record*, and was the Canon's literary confidant, and, though the two friends had but little personal acquaintance with each other, a great bulk of correspondence passed between them. Dr. Heuser, therefore, was most qualified to undertake the task of writing the Canon's biography, and the work he produced is a vast fund of information, biographical and literary: it contains those details we wish to know of Canon Sheehan, and is a sound guide to the study of his works. Most of the notes in the foregoing review have been based on this biography.

Father Phelan's study of Canon Sheehan is a master-

piece in its kind. It is a collection of minute details arranged and embellished in an ingenious manner so as to make the great author live before us. It is the eloquent tribute of a warm, familiar acquaintance and an appreciative reviewer of his works. It reveals, in short space, the greatness of Canon Sheehan, the author and the priest, and embraces everything of interest in his life and character.

Another work worthy of note is " The Souvenir of Canon Sheehan "—a volume of extracts from his writings made by a Sister of the Presentation Convent in Doneraile.

No one who has read the works of Canon Sheehan but must feel the desire for some collection of his best thoughts. Great truths are scattered everywhere through his pages, and we feel the inclination to pause and memorise or mark the margin where some of his surprise treasures lie embedded. All such trouble will be spared those who possess a copy of " The Souvenir." It contains judicious selections from almost every one of the Canon's works. They are such thoughts as do not lose force by removal from their context, and, to give a semblance of order, they are arranged under the titles of the months of the year. The books from which they are taken are in all cases indicated. In " The Souvenir," therefore, we find the essence of Canon Sheehan's greatest thoughts. Therein we have many an apt quotation and many an inspiring idea to urge us on to noble endeavour : " The Souvenir " is a synopsis of the sublime gospel that runs through all his books.

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